BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION IN IRELAND

by

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(A.B., Boston College 1929)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

1932

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OUTLINE

It is now fourteen hundred years since Ireland enjoyed her Golden Age. It was fourteen centuries ago when she was known as the "Island of Saints and Scholars." Ages have passed since Ireland stood as the model and exemplar of Christian civilization. Upon her shores learning and culture flourished so that her brilliance shone as a beacon light upon the darkness and surrounding barbarism of the Middle Ages. Here was a refuge upon a turbulent sea, here was an oasis of learning in a desert of ignorance. Foreign Scholars flocked to Ireland's monastic schools where they were hospitably received royally treated and given board, room, books and instruction free of charge. Nor was she content with this but felt the urge to reconstruct the Europe which had fallen with the crumbling of the Roman Empire. Determined not only to convert to Christianity but to civilization and learning as well, the Irish missionaries like the Athenians who bore from the sacred crucible of the mother city embers to light the hearths of overseas colonies, carried from the unquenchable fires of Kildare beacons that were to burn throughout Britain and Europe forevermore.

EARLY IRELAND

For the most part the early history of Ireland is shrouded by the veil of legend and myth. But in order to understand the Christian civilization which soared to such heights in Ireland we must first make a study of her pagan civilization and culture.

What kind of country was pagan Ireland? What type of civilization if any existed there?

The character accorded pagan Ireland by some ancient foreign writers in Latin and Greek is far from flattering.* We are told that they had a predilection for human flesh, that they were given to incest, that they were utterly lacking in moral sense - in brief that they were barbarians of the worst kind.

Strabo, a Greek writer, informs us that "About Britannia are some small islands, and a great one, Hibernia, stretching close to Britannia, toward the North. Of this I have nothing certain to state, but that its inhabitants are more rustic (wilder) than the (Celtic) Britons, and that they feed on human flesh, and devour a large quantity of food and deem it honorable to eat the bodies of their deceased parents." Then follows an assertion regarding incestuous practises, and finally an admission which proves that Strabo himself did not believe what he had written. "But the things we thus relate," he affirms,

* Gurn, Joseph "Before St. Patrick Came" Columbia March 1931 Page 14

"are destitute of witnesses worthy of credit in such affairs."*

Solinus, a Latin writer, whom some accept as an authority, wrote about the year 238 A. D. as follows: "Hibernia approaches to Britain in size: it is inhuman in the rough manners of its inhabitants, it is so luxuriant in its grass that unless its cattle are now and again removed from pasturage, satiety may cause danger to them. There is no snake, a few birds, an inhospitable and warlike nation, the conquerors (among whom) having first drunk the blood of their enemies afterward besmear their faces therewith. They regard right and wrong alike..... No bee has been brought thither; and if anyone scatters dust or pebbles brought from thence among the hives (in other countries) the swarms desert their combs. The breadth of this island is uncertain." The flagrant inaccuracy of his comparison of Ireland and Britian (the latter term including Scotland in the Roman), his assertion as to the fewness of birds and the total absence of bees, his fairy tale regarding the ill effects of Irish dust and pebbles are in themselves sufficient to discredit his whole testimony. These excerpts are a representative sample of the character of the knowledge of pre-Christian Ireland in ancient times.**

*Gurn, Joseph ibid. Page 14
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We know that St. Patrick was brought to Ireland in his youth as a slave and that he herded cattle for his Irish master. If those ancient writers are correct, if the pagan Irish were cannabalistic savages, how did the young herdsman escape being eaten by them? St. Patrick makes no mention in his "Confessio" or elsewhere of the abominable practices which we are asked to believe were characteristic of the Irish of St. Jerome's day. He could never have converted the Irish had they been such a depraved race.

"In this connection it is significant to find Fr. F. J. Quigley, declaring in an article contributed to the Irish Ecclesiastical Record, official organ of the Irish Church, May 1930: "St. Patrick tells us in his "Confessio" that he was a dull scholar, so dull that his (Irish) convert pupils outshone him in literary knowledge and laughed at his rusticity of expression in Latin." Here we discover on the word of St. Patrick himself, that Ireland was not lacking in good scholars before his advent and that these scholars were thoroughly familiar with the Latin language. Latin according to some writers was cultivated in Ireland for centuries before the coming of St. Patrick. But Latin scholars are not to be found among cannibals and incestuous brutes."*

We also find St. Jerome denouncing an Irish scholar who had the hardihood to censure his commentaries

*Gurn, Joseph ibid. Page 14

on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. He calls him a "most stupid fellow, heavy with Irish porridge" as cited by Dr. Kenney. The identity of this Irishman is uncertain. But the fact remains that he was able to appraise the commentaries mentioned which shows that he was versed in Latin, since they are in that language. The Catholic Encyclopedia states that with the exceptions of his commentaries on Galatians, St. Jerome's "explanations of the New Testament have no great value."

It is burdening credulity too much to see an Irish scholar able to cross pens with St. Jerome on the Continent, and at the same time to be required to believe that he belonged to a race of cannibals with social relationships to match. This pen-duel took place before the arrival of St. Patrick in Ireland and is one indication of the absurdity of the theory which holds that the migration of Irish learned men to the Continent was a strictly post-Patrician development.

As aforesaid the early history of Ireland is shrouded by the veil of legend and myth. We know not whence came the first settlers or how they lived or why they came. Nevertheless the fact remains that all legend concerning Irish history points to ancient Greece or Scythia for their first ancestors. These early colonists are reputed to have come directly while others after short stays in either Spain or Gaul.* On the whole though, early

* Joyce, P. W. "Concise History of Ireland." Page 55

Irish history favors the Milesian belief, namely that Ireland's first settlers came from Spain whence they had come from Greece.

The clan or Tribe system prevailed in Ireland as it did in all other countries of Europe in early ages. A Clan or Sept consisted or a number of families all of one kindred, living in the same district and generally bearing the same family name, such as O'Donnell or Mac Carthy. A Tribe was a larger group consisting of several clans or septs, all more or less distantly related to one another. A Tribe occupied a territory of which each sept had a separate district, without interference by other septs of the same tribe. Over each tribe there was a chief who had authority over all the lesser chiefs of each sept in the tribe. If the territory occupied by the tribe were very large the chief was a ri or king.

Before History itself can offer any detailed information Ireland was ruled by kings of whom the one who dwelt at Tara was usually the highest. He was called the Ard-ri, or over king, since he claimed authority over all the others. There was also a king for each of the five provinces - Leinster, Munster, Connaught, Ulster, and Meath - who was subject to the Ard-ri.

The king was invariably chosen from one particular ruling family yet with this noteworthy difference from other peoples that instead of accepting the eldest son as the legitimate heir they chose whatever member of

the family they considered the wisest, best, and bravest. In this once instance they show themselves wiser than their contemporaries who followed the law of primogeniture.* As early as the third century in a well-known piece of Irish literature, Cairbre, afterwards king of Ireland, is depicted as asking his father Cormac Mac Airt the question: "For what qualifications is a king elected over countries and tribes of people?" And Cormac in his answer embodied the views of practically every clan in Ireland down to the beginning of the seventeenth century.** "He is chosen," said the king, from the goodness of his shape and family, from his experience and wisdom, from his prudence and magnanimity, from his eloquence and bravery in battle, and from the number of his friends." He was, however, always chosen from the near kindred of the reigning chieftain.

After the election a day was set for inauguration. It was indeed a solemn ceremony. The new king standing on the Inauguration Stone*** swore a solemn oath in the hearing of all that he would govern his people with strict justice and that he would observe the laws of the land and maintain the old customs of the tribe or kingdom.

*Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 2 Article under Brehon Page 754

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*** Joyce, P. W. "The Story of Ancient Irish Civilization" There was always one particular spot for the ceremony on which usually stood a high mound or fort with an Inauguration Stone on top and often a great branching old tree, under the shade of which the main proceedings were carried on.

Then he put by his sword; and one of the chiefs, whose special office it was, put into his hand a long, straight, white wand. This was to signify that he was to govern, not by violence or harshness, but by justice, and that his decisions were to be straight and stainless like the wand.

The kings of Ireland lived always in great style and splendor. They had about them innumerable waiting-men, servants and chiefs themselves who, noble though they were, deemed it honorable to serve their king. All held responsible positions but were well paid for their services. The chief steward was a veritable plenipotentiary. His word in matters of the household, i. e. the kitchen waiting service, bed-chamber attendance, etc., was law. There was also a chief horseman who kept the horses and stables always in the best of condition. There was a champion who might at any time be called upon to do single combat with any opponent. There were Ollaves i.e. learned and distinguished men of the several professions - Historians, Poets, Physicians, Builders, Brehons or Judges, Musicians, and so forth. All were held in high honor and exercised their several professions for the benefit of the king and his household, for which each had a house and a tract of land free, or some other equivalent stipend.

Each day the whole company sat in the great hall at dinner, arranged at table in order of rank; the great grandees and the Ollaves near the king, others of less

importance lower down while the attendants - when they were not otherwise occupied - sat at tables of their own at the lower end of the hall. All this has a democratic aspect to which no other country could offer an equal. Of course all this entailed great expense and to enable the king to live in all the grandeur and splendor becoming royalty he had a large tract of land free, besides which, every tenant and householder throughout his dominion had to make a yearly payment according to his means. These payments were made not in money but in kind. Much income necessarily accrued to the king for he was expected to be lavish in giving presents, and hospitable without stint in receiving and entertaining guests.

These old Irish kings, it is true, had a free and easy life, when they were not engaged in warfare. The Irish took care however that their kings had not too much power in their hands; so that they could not always do as they pleased - a proper and wise arrangement. They were in the true sense "limited monarchs." They could not enter on any important undertaking affecting the kingdom or the public without consulting their people. On such occasions the king had to call a meeting of his chief men and ask their advice and if necessary take their votes when there was a difference of opinion. Moreover the kings were obliged to obey the law as well as their subjects.*

* Joyce, P. W. "Social History of Ancient Ireland" This picture of the society of the ancient Irish kings is drawn from Joyce's "Social History of Ancient Ireland."

FOREIGN CONQUESTS

From remote times the Irish had a genius for war and a love of fighting and it is a universal conviction to-day that this characteristic is no less lacking. In old times the Scots - as the Irish were then called- were well-known for their warlike qualities and very much dreaded; so much so that all manner of weird and fabulous stories regarding them were believed by the people of the Continent. One Latin writer tells us that Irish mothers were wont to present the first food on the point of a sword to their newly born male infants, as a sort of dedication to war. This is obviously an invention yet it shows most certainly the reputation that the Irish people had earned for themselves abroad. They fought a great deal among themselves at home but in this they were not a bit worse than the English people or the Continental nations of the same period.*

When the first Dane appeared on the coast of Ireland at the close of the eighth century Ireland could look back on an authentic history of at least one thousand years during which no foreigner had attempted occupation. Dating from that very century there is still extant a history in the old Irish tongue which speaks of the last invasion of Ireland by the Gaels themselves and of the establishment of the kingdom in the time of Alexander the Great.**

* Joyce, P. W. Social History Page 72-73

** Fitzpatrick, Benedict "Ireland and the Making of Britain" Page 84

From that time forward the Gaels had never known any rule but Irish rule, administered through all the clans, under a single royal dynasty and government, called in history the Milesian, that still endured from the time when the last migration of the Gaels entered the island.

That the old Irish should be warlike is only what we might expect; seeing that they were descended from the Continental Gauls who in ancient times were renowned as warriors and conquerors. The Irish were not content with fighting at home but made themselves formidable in Wales and Scotland. For several hundred years - from the third to the sixth century, and even after - the Irish streamed continually to Scotland across the narrow sea. In this way was the civilization which developed to such a high point in Ireland borne into Scotland, Wales and throughout the British Isles. The first of these migrations originated in a famine, much the same as the exodus from Ireland to America was set going by the terrible famine of 1847. Some of these migrations were really raids for plunder and booty, while others had colonization as their object. It was not unusual for an Irish chieftain to own two territories, one in Ireland and the other in Wales or Scotland.

THE BREHON LAWS

The ancient Irish had a system of laws which grew up gradually among them from time immemorial. And there were lawyers who made law the business of their lives. When a lawyer was very ditinguished and became noted for his knowledge, skill and justice, he was recognized as competent to act as a Brehon or judge. A brehon was also a magistrate by virtue of his position and belonged to a very ditinct social class. From this word "Brehon" the old Irish law is now commonly called the "Brehon Law."

Many of these Brehons were of course connected with the king yet there were also many who operated independently much as the lawyers of our own day, judging or pleading and collecting fees from the litigants in each case. To become a lawyer a person had to go through a regular course of study and training. The subjects were specified with great exactness and the time was much longer than that required by a young man nowadays who aspires to become a barrister. Until this whole course had been mastered the student was not permitted to practise as a lawyer of any kind - pleader, law-agent, professor of law, law-adviser, or Brehon. Law was perhaps the most difficult of all professions to study. For there were many strange terms hard to understand, all of which had to be learned, many puzzling forms to go through, many circumstances to be taken into

account in all transactions where law was brought in, or where trials took place in a Brehon's court. And if the smallest error were committed or if there was the least flaw or omission, either by the client or by his lawyer, it was instantly pounced upon by the opposing pleader, and the case was likely enough to go against them.

The Brehons held court at regular intervals, where cases were tried. If a man were wronged by another, he summoned him to one of these courts, and there were lawyers to plead for both sides, and witnesses were examined as they are to-day; and after the Brehon had listened carefully to all he gave his decision. This decision was given by the Brehon alone: there were no juries such as we have now. If the verdict was unsatisfactory a higher Brehon might be called to judge the case and if the decision were found unjust the original Brehon might be forced to return his fee, pay damages and would be in the eyes of the people so discredited that his business would suffer from lack of employment. Thus the Brehons had to be very careful in trying cases and in giving their decisions.

No one was free from the arm of the law, the highest people in the land, even kings and queens had to submit to the laws, like other people. The following tale might well illustrate the true power of the Brehon laws. About the fourth century there dwelt at Tara a king named Mac Con whose queen had a plot of land, not far from the palace, planted

with glasheen i.e. the wood-plant for dyeing blue. In the neighborhood there lived a female brewy, or keeper of a hostel for travellers, who had flocks and herds like all brewys. One night a flock of sheep belonging to her broke into the queen's grounds, and ate up or destroyed the whole crop of glasheen; whereupon the queen summoned her for damages.

In due course the case came before the king (for the queen would not appear before an ordinary Brehon) and on hearing the evidence he decided that the sheep should be forfeit to the queen to pay for the crop. Now, although the glasheen was an expensive and valuable crop, the sheep were worth a great deal more; and the people were enraged at this unjust sentence; but they dared not speak out, for Mac Con was a usurper and a tyrant.

Among the people present at the trial was a handsome, noble-looking boy, who being by nature just-minded, could not contain himself when the unfair and oppressive sentence was read; and he cried out amid the dead silence: "That is an unjust judgment! Let the fleece be given up for the glasheen - the sheep-crop for the land-crop - for both will grow again!"

The king was astonished and enraged, and became still more so when the people exclaimed with one voice: "That is a true judgment, and he who has pronounced it is surely the son of a king."

In this way the people, to their great joy, discovered who Cormac was. How he managed to escape the vengeance of the king we are not told; but escape he did; and after a time the usurper was expelled from Tara, and Cormac was put in his place. To this day Cormac Mac Art is celebrated in Irish records as a skilful lawyer and writer on law, and as the wisest and most illustrious of all the ancient Irish kings.

As soon as the Irish had learned the art of writing, they began to write down their laws in books. There is every reason to believe that before the time of St. Patrick the pagan Brehons had law books. But they were full of paganism - pagan gods, pagan customs, and pagan expressions - and they would not answer for a Christian people. So about six years after St. Patrick's arrival, when Christianity had been pretty widely spread through Ireland, he saw that it was necessary to have a new code, suitable for the new and pure faith, and he advised Laeghaire (Laery), the Ard-ri, to take steps to have the laws revised and re-written. The king, seeing this could not be avoided appointed nine learned and eminent persons - of whom he himself and St. Patrick were two - to carry out this important work. At the end of three years these nine produced a new code, quite free from any taint of paganism: and this book got the name of Senchus Mor, meaning "great old law-book."

There seems to have been no hard and fast line drawn between civil and criminal offences in the Brehon Law. They were both tried in the same way before a Brehon who heard the case argued, and either acquitted or else found guilty and assessed the fine. In the case of a crime committed by an individual all the sept were liable. If the offence were one against the person and the criminal happened to die, then the liability of the sept was wiped out, for, according to the maxim "the crime dies with the criminal."* If, however, the offence had been one causing damage to property or causing material loss, then the sept remained still liable for it, even after the death of the criminal. This regulation resulted in every member of the sept having a direct interest in suppressing crime. Penalties and fines were proportioned to the dignity and wealth of the person committing the crime. Also an assault on a person of rank was more severely punished than one on an ordinary man. Fines for crimes against the person were particularly heavy; two cows, for instance, was the fine for a blow which raised a lump by did not draw the blood. The punishments awarded by the Brehons were of a most humane character. There is no trace of torture or of ordeal in the ancient Irish law.

Ancient Irish law was not produced by a process resembling legislation, but grew up gradually around the dicta and judgments of the most famous Brehons. There were

* Cath. Ency. Vol. 2 Page 755

only four periods in the entire history of Ireland when special laws were said to have been enacted by legislative authority: first during the reign of Cormac Mac Airt in the third century; second, when St. Patrick came; third by Cormac Mac Culinan, the King-Bishop of Cashel, who died in 908; and lastly by Brian Boru, about a century later. But the great mass of the Brehon code appears to have been traditional or to have grown with the slow growth of custom. Some authorities consider the number of books upon law in old times to have been legion. They perished, with so much of the rest of Irish literature, under the horrors of the English invasion and the penal laws, when an Irish manuscript was a source of danger to the possessor.

The essential idea of modern law is entirely absent from the Brehon's, if by law is meant a command, given by some one possessing authority to do or to forbear doing a certain thing under pains and penalties. There is no sanction laid down in the Brehon laws against those who violated them, nor did the State provide any such sanction. This was the great inherent weakness of Irish jurisprudence, that it lacked the strong controlling hand of a strong central government to enforce its decisions. It is a weakness inseparable from a tribal organization. When a Brehon had heard a case and delivered his judgment, there was no machinery of law set in motion to force the litigant to accept it. The only executive authority in

~~in~~ ancient Ireland which lay behind the decision of the judge was the traditional obedience and good sense of the people, and it does not appear that this was ever found wanting. The Brehons never appear to have had any trouble in getting decisions accepted by the common people. The public appear to have seen to it that the Brehon's decision was always carried out. This was indeed the very essence of democratic government, with no executive authority behind it but the will of the people. There can be no doubt whatever that the system trained an intelligent and law-abiding public. Even Sir John Davies, the Elizabethan jurist, confesses, "there is no nation or people under the Sunne that doth have equall and indifferent justice better than the Irish; or will rest better satisfied with the execution thereof although it be against themselves, so that they may have the protection and benefit of the law when upon just cause they do desire it."*

* Cath. Ency. Vol. 2 Page 756

THE DRUIDS

When Ireland was pagan the people were taught their religion, such as it was, by Druids. These Druids were the most learned men of the time, and they had in their hands all the learned professions - they were not only Druids, but judges, prophets, poets and even physicians. They were the only teachers and were employed to instruct the sons and daughters of kings and chiefs in whatever learning was then known. They were also advisors to kings and people on all important occasions; so they were, as we can well understand, held in high estimation and exercised great influence. They had the reputation of being mighty magicians and could do many wonderful things as our old romantic stories tell, and as people firmly believed. Many instances of their power are related in old Irish tales. They could raise a magic fog, bring darkness in the day; they could bring dawn showers of fire or blood, cause snowfall in summer or bring storms and tempests on land or sea. They could drive a man mad by their sorcery - a power which was dreaded most of all by the people in general.

The Irish were not alone in this superstitiousness for the Greeks and Romans of old had - as we know - their augurs or soothsayers, who forecasted the future, like the Druids, and by much the same observations, signs and tokens. We must not judge these ancient people whether

Greek, Roman or Irish, too severely for believing in these prophets, for although there are no Druids or soothsayers now, we have amongst us plenty of palmists and fortune-tellers of various kinds, who make a good living out of those people who are simple enough to believe in them.

There were Druids in every part of Ireland; but Tara was their chief seat, where they were most powerful; and those who have read the early history of Ireland will recollect St. Patrick's contest with them in the presence of king Laeghaire and his court, and how he put them down in argument.

The pagan Irish had many gods and many idols. Among other things they worshipped the Fairies and there still exist in Ireland to-day superstitiqus folk who think that the Fairies, called Shee, still dewll in the old lisses, raths, or forts that are scattered everywhere throughout Ireland. Mannanan Mac Lir was the Irish sea-god like Neptune of the Greeks and Romans. Angus Mac-an-age was a mighty magician, who had his glorious palace under the great mound of Brugh or the Boyne. There were many other gods and goddesses. Poets, physicians and smiths had three gods whom they severally worshipped, three sisters all named Brigit. Besides gods and goddesses there were fairy-queens, witch-hages, goblins and sprites.

The idols worshipped by the pagan Irish were nearly all of them stones, mostly pillar-stones which were sometimes covered over with gold, silver or bronze. The people also worshipped the elements. The worship of wells was very universal. These later were afterwards used as baptismal fountains by St. Patrick, St. Columkille and other early missionaries so that though they were no longer worshipped, they were as much venerated by the Christians as they had been by the pagans.

It must not be supposed that each of the objects mentioned above was worshipped by all the people of Ireland. Each person in fact worshipped whichever he pleased and it was usual for individuals or a tribe to choose some idol or element or pagan divinity which they held in veneration as their special guardian god.

THE BARDS

This class forms the third of the privileged classes that dwelt in Ireland in pre-Christian days. Under this term we include both poets and chroniclers. Sometimes history and poetry are represented as distinct branches of learning in ancient Erin; it is certain however that in pre-Christian times, and long after the introduction of Christianity, the chronicler made poetry the medium of preserving and communicating to posterity both the genealogical and historical records of his tribe and clan. Until St. Patrick came only three classes of persons were permitted to speak in public in Erin: a Chronicler to relate events and tell stories; a Poet to satirize and eulogize; a Brehon to pass sentence from precedents and commentaries. For a long time the judicature had belonged to the poets alone but later the profession of the judge and poet became quite distinct. However the Chronicler and Poet drew together so that one term is identical with the other.

The training in this profession was quite as rigorous as that pursued by the Brehons.. The Ollamh Poet or "Doctor of Poetry" was required by law to spend at least twelve years in careful preparation for his final "degree" and to have prepared for public recitation seven times fifty tales or stories of battle, courtships, voyages, cattle-spoils, sieges, slaughters or other similar incidents.

He was also required to be perfectly familiar with the pedigrees of the principal families, their topographical distribution, the synchronisms of remarkable events both at home and abroad, and the etymologies of names in Erin. He was besides required to know the artistic rules of poetry and to have a knowledge of the seven kinds of verse and their various metres. It is evident that these manifold accomplishments required long and careful study; and the necessity of this training explains the wonderful accuracy of Ireland's ancient historical and genealogical records. No man was qualified to become a Doctor of Poetry who was not able to compose any extempore stanza on any subject proposed to him. Many of the works of these ancient poets are preserved for us in the Book of Leinster or the Book of the Dun Cow or the other books found in the monasteries or palaces.

THE OGHAM ALPHABET

The use of letters and most probably of Roman letters was quite common in Erin before the coming of St. Patrick. Besides the Roman alphabet there was however an earlier and ruder alphabet which seems to have been used in Erin even in pre-historic times. This is called the Ogham alphabet. All knowledge of this alphabet was completely lost until the year 1820 when Mr. John Windele discovered the first inscription in the county Cork.

Since that time no less than 200 inscribed stones have been discovered in various parts of the country, but especially in the South and West. Twenty-two stones have been found in Wales and Devonshire and ten in Scotland. Mr. Brash of Cork has very painstakingly examined these stones and he believes the Ogham to have been invented not in Ireland but somewhere in the East whence it was carried to Egypt and Spain and thence to Ireland. Since the stones have no Christian symbols he traces them all to pre-Christian times. The key to the interpretation of the Ogham is contained in the Book of Ballymote and also in the Book of Leinster. Bury in contradiction to Mr. Brash states that this alphabet was probably a native invention since such inscriptions are found only in Ireland and in regions of the British Isles which came within the range of Irish influence.*

*Bury, J. B. "The Life of St. Patrick and his Place in History" Page 185

METALLURGY

There can be no more conclusive proof or test of the exact state of prehistoric civilization than that which is afforded by the general knowledge and use of metals. Of the savage tribes of Africa some are well acquainted with iron, and therefrom manufacture weapons; they are also possessed of gold; but when we come to the use of metals which require great experience in mining to recognize them in their natural state, and when we find a composite metal of which the parts are mixed in proper proportions, we arrive at a very advanced stage of metallurgy.

"From the earliest times in the history of Western Europe Ireland has been renowned for her work in metal. The first metal used was copper and copper weapons are found in Ireland dating from 2000 B.C. or even earlier, the beautiful designs of which show that the early inhabitants of the country were skilled workers in metal. Fields of copper exist all along the southern seaboard of Ireland. Numbers of flat copper celts or axes have been found modelled on the still earlier stone implements. By degrees the influence of the early stone axe disappears and axes of a true metal type are developed. Primitive copper knives and awls are also abundant. The fineness of the early copper work is seen at its best in the numerous copper halberd

blades found in Ireland. These blades varying from nine to sixteen inches in length, were fastened at right angles by rivets into wooden shafts. The blades show a slight sickle-like curve and are of the highest workmanship. Halberds somewhat similar in type have been found in Spain, North Germany and Scandinavia.

*Between the years 2000 and 1800 B.C. the primitive metal-workers discovered that bronze, a mixture of tin and copper, was a more suitable metal than pure copper for the manufacture of weapo s; and the first period of the bronze age may be dated from 1800-1500 B.C. The bronze celts at first differed little from those made of copper, but gradually the type developed from the plain wedge-shaped celt to the beautiful socketed celt, which appears on the scene in the last or fifth division of the bronze age (900-350 B.C.).It was during the age of bronze that spears came into general use, as did the sword and rapier. The early spear-heads were simply knife-shaped bronze weapons riveted to the ends of shafts, but by degrees the graceful socketed spear-heads of the late bronze age were developed.

*Stone moulds for casting the early forms of weapons have been found, but as, the art of metal working became perfected, the use of sand moulds was discovered with the result that there are no extant examples of moulds for

* Dunn & Lennox - Glories of Ireland "Irish Metal Work" Article in the above book Pages 78-79

casting the more developed forms of weapons. The bronze weapons - celts, swords and spear-heads - are often highly decorated. In these decorations can be traced the connection between the early Irish civilization and that of the eastern Mediterranean. The bronze age civilization in Europe spread westward from the eastern Mediterranean either by the southern route through Italy, Spain, France and thence to Ireland or as seems more probable up the river Danube then down the Elbe and so to Scandinavia whence traders by the north of Scotland introduced the motives and patterns of the Aegean into Ireland. Whichever way the eastern civilization penetrated into Ireland it left England practically untouched in her primitive barbarity.

*Of gold work for which Ireland is especially famous the principal feature in the bronze age was the lunula, a crescent-shaped flat gold ornament generally decorated at the ends of the crescent. These lunulae are found in profusion all over Ireland.

*Gold collars are numerous in Ireland and also date from the bronze age. The earliest form of collar is "torc" of twisted gold. Another type, later in date than the torc, is the gold ring-shaped collar. Two splendid examples of this latter type were found at Clonmacnois the decoration of which in La Tene, or trumpet, pattern,

*Dunn & Lennox -Glories of Ireland- "Irish Metal Work" Article in the above book Pages 78-79

shows the connection between the Irish and continental designs. A find of prehistoric gold ornaments in county Clare should be mentioned. An immense number was there discovered in 1854 hidden together in a cist, the value of the whole being estimated at over £3000.

*After the bronze age comes the iron age. The introduction of iron wrought a great change in metal working but as iron is a metal very subject to oxidation, comparatively few early iron remains are found. There are some swords of an early pattern in the National Museum at Dublin."

That the ancient Irish were familiar with mines and with the modes of smelting and of extracting metals of various kinds from the ore, is shown by frequent notices of mines and mining both in the Brehon Laws and in the general literature. The Laws enumerate eleven things that add to the value of land, among which is a mine of copper or of iron. The Senchus Mor mentions a penalty for digging a silver mine without the permission of the owner. An ancient Irish Manuscript tract of the Brehon Laws quoted by Petrie gives the pay of the delver who digs copper ore. When Conall Cernach was fighting the men of Connaught while retreating in his chariot he came to a river. There were miners washing ore in the river above him. Here the washing of ore is mentioned as quite an ordinary occurrence and in

*Dunn & Lennox - Glories of Ireland - "Irish Metal Work" Article in the above book. Pages 78-79

many others of the oldest Irish tracts the smelting of ore is frequently referred to as a matter very familiar.

This documentary evidence is confirmed by testimony of Sir Richard Griffith who remarks that the number of ancient mine excavations still visible in every part of Ireland prove that an ardent spirit of mining adventure must have pervaded the country at some remote period. He instances old copper mines at Mucruss near Killarney, and at Ballydehob in Cork and the lead mines of Milltown in Clare, the oldest mines perhaps in Ireland. In these last many rude tools were found such as oaken shovels and iron picks of extraordinary size and weight.

In Ireland as elsewhere copper was known before iron. It was almost always used as bronze. We have unquestionable documentary evidence such as the Confession of St. Patrick that iron was in familiar use in Ireland in the fifth century of the Christian era: and as we learn from Tacitus that the Caledonians used iron swords in his time, it is certain that this metal was used in Ireland as early as the first century. Among the pagan remains found in a carn at Loughcrew were many specimens of iron implements all as might be expected very much corroded by rust.

A fair estimate of the development of the arts and crafts of ancient Erin may also be formed from the fact that the Brehon Laws contain so much material concerning the

workers in these trades. Throughout the laws very definite rules and regulations are set down with regard to the various crafts. A single word or indeed a few words do not suffice to describe the different sciences but very many titles each describing a separate occupation demonstrate very clearly the high development which work with metals and stone had reached in Ireland. Some craftsmen worked exclusively in stone others in brass, iron, copper, gold or silver or tin. Some were solely smelters, miners, braziers or artists in the strict sense of the word. An enumeration of the various titles or occupations concerned only with work in metal show in no uncertain way the ramifications and subdivisions that the metallic art had undergone even in pagan Ireland.

Many evidences, both from ancient writings or legends and archaeological discovery, further emphasize the importance of the development of the metallic art and the importance attached to its environs and connections. It is certain that gold and silver mines were worked in Ireland from the most remote antiquity; and that gold was found anciently in much greater abundance than it has been in recent times. Our oldest traditions record not only the existence of the mines, but also the names of kings who had them worked and even those of the artificers.

We have in the annals, records which show that gold was everywhere within reach of the wealthy, and was used by them in personal decoration and in the words of art.

But though the home produce was abundant it hardly kept pace with the demand; for the higher classes had quite a passion for gold ornaments; and some of our oldest traditions record the importation of gold, and articles of gold; just as horses, cloaks and bronze articles were imported. For example we are told in a legend in the Book of Leinster that Credne, the great Dedannan caird or artificer was drowned while bringing golden ore from Spain. The general truthfulness of these traditions and records is fully borne out by the great quantities of golden ornaments found in every part of the country. During the last two centuries innumerable golden articles of various kinds have been dug up from the bottom of a bog near the village of Cullen, on the borders of Limerick and Tipperary as well as many of the implements used by the old goldsmiths in their work such as crucibles, bronze ladles, etc; from which it is probably as O'Curry remarks that this place was anciently inhabited by a race of goldsmiths who carried on there the manufacture for generations.

As in the case of gold we have also very ancient legends about silver. Our old legendary histories tell us

that King Enna Airgthech who reigned about a century and a half after Tigernmas, was the first that made silver shields in Ireland,which he distributed among his chieftain friends.* The legend goes on to say that they were made at a place called Argetros or Silverwood, situated in Kilkenny, which was said to derive its name from those silver shields. Like gold, silver was also imported from Spain. In the house of Gerg there were drinking-bowls with rims ornamented with silver brought from Spain.

On many of the specimens of metal work preserved in the National Museum may be seen enamel patterns worked with exquisite skill, showing that the Irish artists were thorough masters of this branch of art. Their enamel was a sort of whitish or yellowish transparent glass as a foundation, colored with different metallic oxides. It was fused on the surface of a heated metal, where it adhered, and was worked while soft into various patterns. Red or crimson enamel which seems to have been a favorite was called cruan, from the Irish word cru, blood. The art of enameling was common to the Celtic people of Great Britain and Ireland in pre-Christian as well as in Christian times; and beautiful specimens have been found in both countries, some obviously Christian and others as their designs and other characteristics show, belonging to remote pagan ages. This art like all the others was taken up and improved by the Christian artists who used it in metal work with the interlaced ornamentation, similar to that in the Book of Kells and other manuscripts.

*Joyce, P.W.-A Social History of Ancient Ireland Vol. I Page 557

STONE-CARVING

The earliest monument to which we can point as showing any trace of aesthetic ambition is Stonehenge. Its huge blocks are not rough but hewn and their disposition shows a feeling for symmetry and artistic subordination.which may almost be called cultivated. These huge stone monuments represent the first stage in the development of Celtic art.*

For the most part in pagan times work in stone was principally concerned with the manufacture of weapons and rude tools. Innumerable examples of these exhibited both in the British Museum in London and the National Museum in Dublin while they show no great ability being very crude nevertheless prove that the Irish were in no way inferior in the making of stone weapons to their contemporaries.

*Armstrong, Sir Walter - Art in Great Britain and Ireland Page 1

MUSIC

"Music," says Thomas Davis, "is the first faculty of the Irish. No enemy speaks slightingly of Irish music, and no friend need fear to boast of it. It is without a rival." The importance which the Irish placed upon music is emphasized by the rigid training they expected an ollamh to submit to, and also by the various and numerous classifications into which their musicians were divided. In Mac Firbis's manuscript Book of Genealogies there is evidence that the number of Irish minstrels was very great; and there is a record of nine different musical instruments in use.*

Heccateus, the great geographer quoted by Diodorus, is the first who mentions the name Celt, and he describes the Celts of Ireland, five hundred years before Christ, as singing songs in praise of Apollo, and playing melodiously on the harp.

There is scarcely any room for doubt that the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland had the use of letters, The Ogham scale and the Ogham music tablature. The Bressay inscription furnishes an early example of music scoring and it is quite apparent that the inscriber regarded the Ogham and the quaint tablature employed as one and the same - in fact three of the mystic strokes are identical with three musical signs. Inasmuch therefore as there are genuine

*Flood, Grattan - A History of Irish Music - Page 4

Ogham inscriptions dating from the third century we are forced to believe that the music tablature also coexisted at the same early period.*

Constantine Nigra writes - the first certain examples of rhyme are found on Celtic soil and amongst Celtic nations in songs made by poets, who are either of Celtic origin themselves or had long resided among the Celtic races..... Final assonance, or rhyme can have been derived solely from the laws of Celtic philology.**

Father Bewerunge professor of ecclesiastical chant in Maynooth College expresses his conviction as follows - It is thought that the old Irish melodies contain within them the germ that may be developed into a fresh luxuriant growth of Irish music. Now the Irish melodies belong to a stage of musical development very much anterior to that of Gregorian Chant. Being based on a Pentatonic Scale they reach back to a period altogether previous to the dawn of musical history.***

*Flood, Grattan - A History Of Irish Music - Page 4
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SUMMARY

Considering by way of resume all the material so far discussed we make the following conclusions:-

1). That long before the Christian era the ancient Irish have a very definite political organization.

2). That they had a code of laws that was well suited to the state of society that then existed, and that

3). Native learning was actively cultivated under the direction of two learned classes called Druids and Bards who were priests, poets, historians and judges as well as teachers.

4). That the pagan Irish had a knowledge of letters.

5). That they had developed many useful arts and were skilled and artistic craftsmen both in metal work and stone-carving.

6). That they excelled in the art and science of Music.

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO IRELAND

Unlike the natives of Britain the Irish in pre-Christian times were not brought into contact with Roman institutions or Roman culture. In consequence they had created and developed a civilization of their own that was in some respects without equal. They were far advanced in the knowledge of metal-work; they engaged in commerce; they loved music and had an acquaintance with letters; and when disputes arose among them, these were settled in duly constituted courts of justice, presided over by a trained lawyer, instead of being settled by the stern arbitrament of force. Druidism was their pagan creed and it would be difficult to find any ministers of religion who were held in greater awe than the Druids.

Commerce and war brought the Irish into contact with Britain and the continent and thus was Christianity gradually introduced into the island. During the fourth century there were in Ireland as well as in other western sections of Europe groups of Christians who conducted their religious practice with much independence and little or no organization. Gradually however the Popes at Rome began to recognize this evil and turned their attention to rectifying it. It is then at the beginning of the fifth century that Pope Augustive sought to bring organization to the Christians dwelling in Ireland. Exactly how there happened

to be Christians in Ireland is not known but it is most probable that Christianity spread to her shores in much the same way that it spread to other districts lying outside the pale of Rome.

The conversion of the Goths had been due to the hostilities which brought Christian captives to their land and not to the missionary enterprises of the Church. "Sons of the Church led captive by enemies made their masters serve the gospel of Christ, and taught the faith to those to whom the fortune of war had enslaved them."

Foreign soldiers who enlisted in the army of the Empire constituted another channel by which knowledge of Christianity was conveyed to the barbarians. Often times these soldiers came under Christian influences in their garrisons and when they returned to their own homes beyond the Imperial frontier they carried the faith with them.

That trade and commerce played a great part in the spread of Christianity to distant parts cannot be doubted. Ireland must truly have been affected by all three channels. Her people as noted before was constantly conducting foreign raids, returning with captives. This was true particularly of Britain and Britain since the first century had been within the Empire. It is not unlikely that some of Erin's native sons attracted by the glamor of the Empire's conquests had joined her army and thus encountered Christianity only to bring back tales of this new religion. The Irish had always been noted as great travellers and in this way Christianity may have trickled into Ireland.

Thus we have indicated some of the ways in which Christianity was spread abroad and in what manner Christian communities were planted in lands outside the Empire. Bury tells us that up to the sixth century the extension of the faith to the barbarians was not due to the direct efforts or deliberate design on the part of the Church but to the relations hostile and pacific which arose between the Empire and its neighbors.

It was only after the Roman Empire had become officially Christian through the conversion of Constantine that the conversion of neighboring states really began: just after that event the victorious religion began to spread generally in Gaul and Britain. It would be difficult to estimate how great was the impetus which this religion derived for the acceleration of its progress, from its acceptance by the head of the Roman State. Another force that contributed greatly to the spread of Christianity arises from the profound respect which the barbarians had for the Empire and the Roman name throughout all their hostilities and injuries. While they were unconsciously dismembering it, they believed in its impregnable stability; Europe without the Empire was unimaginable; the dominion of Rome seemed to them part of the universal order, as eternal as the great globe itself. Taking into account this immeasurable reverence for Rome we can discern what prestige a religion would acquire for neighboring peoples when it became the religion of the

Roman People and the Roman State. Could a people find any more powerful protector than the Deity who was worshipped and feared by the greatest "nation" on earth?

We are not surprised then at the beginning of the fifth century when we find Pope Celestine intending to send a deacon to organise "those believing in Christ" who dwell in Ireland and Britain. At that time a great heresy, Pelagianism had been crushed in Gaul and throughout Western Europe. The heresy was compelled to hide its head in Britain and its poisonous doctrine had been spreading throughout the island until the pillars of the British Church were alarmed and they sent pressing messages across the sea to invite their Gallic brethren to send able champions over to put down the heresy. Palladius because of his experience in combatting this heresy in Gaul and Britain under Germanus was sent by Celestine in 431 A.D. more than likely at the bidding of the Irish Christians who sought to destroy the heresy. Discouraged and a failure Palladius returned to Britain after a brief stay on his mission and then in 432 Celestine sent St. Patrick, who was destined to become the Apostle of Ireland.

Palladius it is true was able to accomplish little or nothing that would have any permanent effect on subsequent Irish history. He is however credited with the founding of three Churches. He was sent of course not as a missionary to convert pagans but merely as an organizer to

those Christians that dwelt in Ireland. He was chosen because of his familiarity, experience and capacity for dealing with the Pelagian heresy which then harassed the Church in Ireland as well as the whole of western Christendom. The historical significance of his appearance in Erin, nevertheless does not lie in any slight ecclesiastical or theological success he may have accomplished; but it is significant because it was the first manifestation of the authority of Rome in Ireland. The coming of Palladius was the first link in the chain which bound Ireland - for some centuries loosely - to the spiritual centre of western Europe.

The conversion of Ireland to Christianity has its place among those manifold changes by which a new Europe was being formed in the fifth and succeeding centuries. The beginnings of the work had been noiseless and dateless, due to the play of accident and the obscure zeal of nameless pioneers; but it was organized and established so that it could never be undone by the efforts of one man who devoted his life to the task.

There is not in all Irish history a single character who has contributed so much or who is more universally venerated than St. Patrick. About the early years of his life we know very little only what we find

in his "Confession." His father Calpurnius, was unquestionably a Roman decurion and belonged to the village of Bonavem Tabernlae.* Here Patrick was born in 389 A.D. and probably lived a normal life until he was sixteen years old when he was captured by some Irish free-booters and carried off to Ireland, there to tend his master's flocks as a menial slave. In his Confession we read that "After I had come to Ireland I was daily tending sheep, and many times in the day I prayed and more and more the love of God, and His faith and fear, grew in me, and the spirit was stirred; so that in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in a night nearly the same, so that I remained in the woods and upon the mountains and before the dawn I was called to prayer by the snow the ice and the rain and I did not suffer from them nor was there any sloth in me, as Isee now, because then the spirit was burning within me."

Six years were thus passed in slavery with Patrick tending his master's flocks. Six years of solitude and meditation in close union with nature aroused in him a higher understanding of the Almighty. This understanding developed by long periods of fastings, exposure and prayer over a stretch of six years aroused in the young man of twenty-two a deep religious piety and conviction. In the ways of a benign Providence the six years of Patrick's captivity became a remote preparation for his future apostolate.

*We cannot with any certainty identify its locality. Bury places it most probably south of the Wall of Hadrian somewhere in western Britain not far from the coast.

He acquired a perfect knowledge of the Celtic tongue in which he would one day announce the glad tidings of Redemption.*

Prompted by "voices" he finally fled from his master's farm and sought passage from the shores of Ireland in a ship which a voice in his dreams had told him would be in readiness to depart. He found the ship but the captain roughly refused him passage only to send after him when the rebuffed Patrick turned away to return to the hut where he dwelt to offer up prayer.** They were three days at sea and afterwards reached land to travel twenty-eight days through a desert. Patrick remained with this band sixty days when they ultimately reached human habitations.

After a few years Patrick succeeded in making his way back to Britain to be received by his kindred. His kin received him as a son and earnestly besought him not to expose himself to fresh dangers but to remain with them for the rest of his life. Visions soon haunted him and he heard the voices of the Irish beseeching him to return and once more walk among them. The memory of the pagan darkness in which they lived haunted him day and night so that he formed the resolution to devote his life to their conversion. He determined to prepare himself thoroughly before attempting to carry on his mission and set out for Auxerre where he intended studying

* Cath. Ency. Vol XI Page 554

** Todd, J. H. St. Patrick Apostle of Ireland Page 368

under St. Martin of tours, whom some have claimed as his relative. His steadfast will was shown by the manner in which he set about preparing himself for his noble work. The years of his captivity served to open his mind to a higher spiritual life, but could afford him no opportunity of adding to his purely literary knowledge, so that when he went first to Auxerre to study he was indeed a holy but not a learned young man. He knew that if he was to succeed he must come with support and resources and fellow workers, accredited and in touch with the Christian communities which already existed in Ireland. He needed not only theological study and the counsels of men of learning and light but material support and official recognition.

Why Patrick chose Auxerre as the place of his study is unknown yet it may have been that there was some special link or intimacy between the Church of Auxerre and one of the British sees. Perhaps some particular interest had been exhibited at Auxerre in the Christian communities of Ireland. There is, in fact, evidence which points to the conclusion that Auxerre was a resort of Irish Christians for theological study. Any of these reasons may have been the one to lead Patrick to Auxerre if it were not the fact of his relationship with St. Martin of Tours as some have claimed.*

* Bury, J. B. Life of St. Patrick Page 49

At Auxerre he studied under St. Martin and also under St. Germanus. Both these men by their rigorous pious lives developed strong discipline of life in young Patrick. At Auxerre he gave himself up to prayer, penance and sacred study in order to prepare himself for that high mission of which God as yet had only given him a dim vision. Latin was difficult for him. He never learned to write it well or even grammatically. But his purpose was fixed.

Patrick was ordained deacon before long and fourteen years passed before he set forth on his chosen task. This long delay can hardly be accounted for by the necessities of an ecclesiastical training. There must have been other impediments or difficulties. He intimates himself that he was not encouraged. Those to whom he looked up for counsel considered his project rash and himself unqualified for such a work. His rusticitas or want of liberal education was urged against him; and perhaps a failure to win support is sufficient explanation of the delay.

At all events Patrick had a discreet if not a sympathetic guide in Germanus, head of the church at Auxerre. Patrick soon won his favor and accompanied him to Britain in 429 and there witnessed the famous "Alleluiah Victory" over the Saxons and Picts. Most of the authorities believe that it was Germanus who sent Patrick to Pope Celestine to receive episcopacy and authority for the Irish mission.* Celestine

* Stoke's edition of the Tripartite Vol 2 Page 419

at first refused since he had already sent Palladius, who was infinitely better fitted to combat the Pelagian heresy, with authority to preach to the Scots who believed in Christ.

But when news was brought to Rome of the failure and death of Palladius, Germanus sent Patrick again to Rome, accompanied by Segetuis, who gave testimony of his merits and desires. Perhaps it was in the interval between these two journeys that St. Patrick went to the Island of Lerins, where he studied and lived with the barefooted hermits under St. Honoratus.

When Honoratus first came to Lerins it was covered with dense shrubberies through whose tangled masses innumerable serpents glided and scared fisherman who chanced to land on the barren and inhospitable rock. But Honoratus nothing daunted, with a few faithful companions set to work soon cleared the place and converted it into a veritable garden of Eden. Here Honoratus founded a famous school which was long celebrated in the South of Europe and produced some of the most distinguished scholars of the fifth century. Such were their piety and learning that all the cities round about strove to have monks from Lerins for their bishops.

Bury maintains that Patrick studied at Lerins before going to Auxerre but the essential fact is that he spent some time there. Here at Lerins Patrick was brought under the spell of the monastic ideal and though his life was not to be

sequestered, but out in the active world of men, monastic societies became a principal and indispensable element of his idea of a Christian Church.

There seemed to be a distinct understanding that Patrick was to be the successor of Palladius and was accordingly consecrated bishop when Palladius died. And so it came about that Patrick started for the field of his work invested with the authority and office which would render his labors most effective. Not rashly surely, nor without due preparation in the greatest and holiest schools of the Continent, did Patrick undertake the work of God. He had prepared himself most carefully for his great mission, he was duly commissioned by St. Celestine*; he received the blessings of the beloved teachers under whose guidance he had lived so long; and thus full of courage and trust in God, he set out for the difficult and dangerous task of converting the Irish to the faith of Christ.

It would add nothing to the value of this thesis to record minutely all the adventures and acts attributed to St. Patrick by his biographers. Many of those adventures were evidently invented to pay a compliment to certain tribes or clans by ascribing the conversion of their ancestors to the preaching of St. Patrick. Others were intended to claim for certain churches and monasteries the honour of being founded by him; and still others were framed with the object of

* Cath. Ency. Vol. XI Page 554

supporting the pretensions of the see of Armagh to the possession of lands or jurisdiction in various parts of Ireland. Due to the introduction of these various legends James Todd, one of St. Patrick's outstanding biographers, states that it is practically impossible to separate completely the true from the fictitious in his history. How much the less can this writer expect to perform this task? Muirchu Maccumachtheni, one of the earliest authors, whose collection of the Acts of St. Patrick has come down to use, admits in strong and somewhat inflated language the hopeless obscurity of the materials he undertook to arrange. This complaint was made before the close of the seventh century. We need not, therefore, in the twentieth, affect to be able to clear up what was then so obscure nor hesitate to confess our inability to do so. In the following account of St. Patrick's labors we shall confine ourself to briefly tracing and touching upon some of the events that seem most likely to be true and that are calculated to exhibit in the most striking manner the character of the man and the nature of his religious teaching.

Patrick arrived in Ireland in 432 A.D. Having lived in Ireland, he knew that since all authority was in the hands of the kings and their kinsmen he must convert the rulers; and Tara was the center of rule, the head of the idolatry and Druidism of Erin. Patrick therefore went

straight to Tara where king Laeghaire (Laery) was then holding his court, and as might be expected came into collision with the Druids.

It was on 26 March, Easter Sunday in 433, that the eventful assembly was to meet at Tara, and the decree went forth that from the preceding day the fires throughout the kingdom should be extinguished until the signal blaze was kindled at the royal mansion. The chiefs and Brehons came in full numbers and the Druids too would muster all their strength to bid defiance to the herald of good tidings and to secure the hold of their superstition on the Celtic race, for their demoniac oracles had announced that the messenger of Christ had come to Erin. St. Patrick arrived at the hill of Slane, at the opposite extremity of the valley from Tara, on Easter Eve, in that year the feast of the Annunciation, and on the summit of the hill kindled the Paschal fire. The Druids at once raised their voice. "O Kind, live forever; this fire, which has lighted in defiance of the royal edict, will blaze forever in this land unless it be this very night extinguished."* The angry monarch ordered his horses yoked and set out to meet the bold stranger, who had dared to kindle the forbidden flame in sight of the royal palace. The Druid Lochru, fiercely and enviously assailed Patrick in presence of the king at Slane, but at Patrick's prayer the impious man was

* Cath. Ency. Vol. XI Page 555

first raised high in the air, and falling down his brains were dashed out on the ground before the king. Now although the monarch and his attendants feared much and in their fear dared not to touch the Apostle, yet we find that next day when Patrick appeared at Tara, the second Druid Luchat the Bald, tried to poison him but that attempt failing he challenged the Saint to contend with him in miracles before all the people. Patrick readily accepted the challenge and of course defeated the Druid, who was consumed to ashes in an attempt to save himself from the flames while the youthful Benignus, one of Patrick's first converts escaped the fiery ordeal unhurt.

These miraculous stories at least express one undoubted truth, that the conflict between Christianity and Druidism was a conflict to the death. The victory gained over Druidism at Tara was conclusive; all the people felt and recognized the might of the man who had conquered the royal Druids; for it was their proud boast that they held dominion over the elements and could make them work at will. But now there appeared a mightier man than they, who utterly vanquished them. Elsewhere indeed they strove to renew the conflict but everywhere the power of Patrick's God vanquished them and they themselves were converted to the true faith of Christ.

St. Patrick not only converted the Irish, but purified their laws, gave new inspiration to their Bards and laid the foundations of that system of education which for the next three centuries made Ireland the light and glory of all western Europe.

When Patrick had proved the might of the God whom he adored, he burnt the idolatrous books at Tara, and overturned the idols of Magh Slecht in Leitrim and gave no toleration to heathen rites. Still in other respects he dealt tenderly with the failings and even the superstitions of the people. Their sacred places were in many places consecrated and utilized for Christian worship; the Druids themselves, when truly converted were not deemed unworthy of a place in the Christian ministry; the wells and streams where pagan rites had often been celebrated, were blessed by the Apostle, and the ancient festivals of the Druids were now made to do honor to the Christian saints. Thus it came to pass that the mid-summer festival of paganism became henceforward a festival in honor of St. John the Baptist, and November Eve of the Druids was made the Vigil of All Saints.

One of Patrick's greatest works was his reform and ratification of the ancient Brehon Laws as embodied in the great compilation known as the Senchus Mor. His labors in this respect claim special attention for the Brehon Code prevailed in the greater part of Ireland down to the year 1600,

and even still its influence is felt in the feelings and habits of the people. The laws of a nation necessarily exercise a great and permanent influence in forming the mind and character of the people, nor can the provisions of the Brehon Code be safely ignored by those whose duty it is even now to legislate for Ireland.

The Brehon Laws, as the code of a pagan people, naturally contained many provisions that regulated the druidical rites, privileges and worship, all of which had to be expugned. The Irish too were a warlike and passionate race who rarely forgave injuries or insults until they were atoned for according to a strict law of retaliation, which was by no means in accordance with the mild and forgiving spirit of the Gospel. In so far as the Brehon Code was founded on this principle it was necessary for St. Patrick to abolish or amend its provisions. Moreover the new Church claimed its own rights and privileges, for which it was important to secure formal legal sanction, and to have embodied in the great Code of the Nation. In short whatever did not clash with the Word of God, in the written Law and in the New Testament and with the consciences of the believers was confirmed in the laws of the Brehons by Patrick, and by the ecclesiastics and chieftains of Erin, for the law of nature had been quite right except the faith and its obligations, and the harmony of the Church and the people. And this is the Senchus.*

* Healy, John - Saints and Scholars - Page 53

St. Patrick naturally enough looked to the Bards - the most lettered class in Ireland - as eligible candidates for the sacred ministry. In a spirit of consummate prudence, he sought to secure the aid of that powerful organization for his infant Church and succeeded in establishing a friendly alliance with the Arch-Poet of Erin. Dubthach Mac Ua Lugair held the two fold office of Chief Poet and Chief Brehon of Ireland and as Patrick had used him in revising the Brehon Laws he was also able to again use his influence and services in winning the Bards to Christianity. Patrick treated the Bards with the utmost generosity and forbearance and filled their minds with brightest visions of a glorious and immortal future beyond the grave. Patrick taught them how to tune their harps to loftier strains than those of the banquet-hall or the battle-march. He sought to drive out from their songs the evil spirit of undying hate and rancorous vengeance, to impress the poet's mind with something of the divine spirit of Christian charity, and to soften the fierce melody of his war-songs with cadences of pity for a fallen foe. He taught the sons of the Bards how to chant the psalms of David and sing together the sweet music of the Church's hymns. Thus by slow degrees their wild ways were tamed, their fierce hearts were softened and the evil spirit of discord gave place to the heavenly spirit of brotherly love.*

Although St. Patrick was accompanied to Ireland by a very considerable number of clerics of every order to aid him in his great task of converting the Irish, still he must have

* Healy, John - Saints and Scholars - Page 57

found it difficult, as new churches were founded and the foreign clergy died out, to supply laborers for the ripening vineyard. As yet there were no Christian schools in Erin. Armagh was probably the first but the school could not be organized for some years later, perhaps about 450.

But meantime Patrick had organized a kind of peripatetic school, which accompanied the Saint in his frequent missionary journeys. The clerical students, his disciples, following him about were able to obtain both theoretical and practical instruction in the work of missionary life. The instruction was oral and memory and practice comprised the method. This movement begun by St. Patrick gradually developed, thirst for learning resulted and the monasteries are the answer.

St. Patrick coming as he did, into a pagan country altogether outside the pale of Roman civilization, had many obstacles to overcome and exercised great ingenuity in overcoming them. He sought to procure everything required for public worship of native manufacture, and indeed he had no other means for the most part of procuring them. This led the Irish artificers to become independent and helps explain the all around ability of the monks in the later monasteries.

Although St. Patrick did not in the ordinary sense of the word establish schools such as are frequently mentioned in the sixth century, he not only trained candidates for the sacred ministry during the earliest years of his mission, but seems to have established in his own city of Armagh a school for carrying on that work in a more regular and efficient manner.

Two extreme and opposite views have been held as to the scope and dimensions of St. Patrick's work in Ireland. There is the old view that he first introduced the Christian religion and converted the whole island, and there is the view that the sphere of his activity was merely a small district in Leinster. The second opinion is refuted by a critical examination of the sources and by its own incapacity to explain the facts while the first cannot be sustained because clear evidence exists that there were Christian communities in Ireland before Patrick arrived.

In actuality Patrick accomplished three things which make him an eminently significant man in history. He organized the Christianity which already existed; he converted kingdoms which were still pagan; and he brough Ireland into connection with the Church of the Empire and made it formally part of universal Christendom.*

It was the aim of Patrick to draw Ireland into close intimacy with continental Christianity. Patrick diffused a knowledge of Latin throughout Ireland. The schools of learning for which the Irish became famous a few generations after Patrick's death, learning which contrasts with his own illiterateness, owe their rise to the contact with Roman ideas and the acquaintance with Roman literature which his labors, more than anything else, lifted within the horizon of Ireland. It was not only the religion but also the language which was attached to it that inaugurated a new period of culture for

*Bury, J. B. - Life of St. Patrick - Page 216

the island and opened a wider outlook of the universe. The Irish were soon busily engaged in trying to work their own past into the woof of ecumenical history, to synchronize their insular memories with the annals of Rome and Greece, and find a nook for their remote land in the history of the world.

These considerations may help us to justly estimate the place which Patrick holds in the history of Europe. Judged by what he actually achieved, he must be placed along with the most efficient of those who took part in spreading the Christian faith beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire. His writings do not enable us to delineate his character, but they reveal unmistakably a strong personality and a spiritual nature. The man who wrote the Confession and the Letter to Coroticus had strength of will, energy in action, resolution without over-confidence, and the capacity for resisting pressure from without. Few readers will escape the impression that he possessed besides enthusiasm the practical qualities most essential for carrying through the task which he undertook in the belief that he had been divinely inspired to fulfil it. A rueful conscientiousness of the deficiencies of his education weighed upon him throughout his career; we can feel this is his almost wearisome insistence upon his rusticitas. Nor has he exagerated the defects of his culture; he writes in the style of an ill-educated man. He was a homo unius libri; but with that book, the Christian Scriptures, he was extraordinarily familiar.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY
AND
GROWTH OF MONASTICISM
(After St. Patrick)

Beyond doubt it is St. Patrick the apostle of Ireland to whom the Irish owe their faith in Christianity and the development of civilization that came with it. While there had been Christians and evidences of a high type of civilization in Ireland before St. Patrick, it was he who in the course of a single generation made the whole island Christian and initiated that chapter of history which made Ireland the "island of saints and scholars."

What Patrick made the Irish church is especially interesting. Mrs. Green has called attention particularly to the fact that in Ireland the Church was the subject of many fewer abuses than anywhere else in the world. It was the intermediary between God and the people and was not permitted to become a tool for various political purposes in the hands of those who happened to find themselves in ecclesiastical authority. Mrs. Green has deservedly high words of praise for it and says in conclusion: "Finally the Irish church never became as in other lands the servant, or the adjunct, or the master of the State. It was the companion of the people, the heart of the nation. To its honor it never served as an instrument of political domination and it never was degraded from first to last by war of religion."*

The greatest monument left by St. Patrick was the organization of education in Ireland for this Irish people whom

* Walsh, James. J. - World's Debt to the Irish -Page 183

he had learned to love as a slave among them and to whom he came back with the mission of Christianization. Apparently Patrick's whole influence as soon as the Irish became converted to Christianity was concentrated on the effort to make them understand just as far as was possible the reasons for the faith that was in them. He himself founded a great school at Armagh which attracted students from all over Ireland. Before long his disciples were also founding schools until Ireland became dotted with institutions of learning many of which afforded opportunities for education for hundreds of students. Scholarship was held in high honor and the Irish reverence for their bards and for their historians which had existed from time immemorial was now extended also to these Christian scholars who devoted themselves to the cultivation of their intellects through scholarly Christian influence.*

The conversion of the Irish people to Christianity by St. Patrick was so opportune in the effect produced by it upon the rest of the civilized world within a comparatively short time, as to be considered quite liberally providential by many who know the times well and have a right to an opinion with regard to the sequence of events. At this time the Roman Empire was being overrun by the barbarian hordes from all sides and in a few years we see that institution, which seemed destined to last forever, crumble and decay before the onslaught of these uncivilized nations. With the fall of the Empire in 476 political chaos supervened and with that a climax of

* Walsh, James J. - World's Debt to the Irish - Page 196

barbaric descent in humanitarianism of all kinds ensued. Literature ceased to be read to a great extent, much less to be written. Education dropped to such a low ebb as to be almost a vanishing factor. The life of the spirit waned and bodily interests became paramount. A feverish restlessness in seeking after pleasure came to replace whatever culture there had been, and the world was in a very sad way indeed so far as the quest of the higher things that would make life really worth living was concerned.

It was just as this period of decadence got well under way that St. Patrick accomplished the conversion of the Irish people without bloodshed and supplied the impetus which was to make Ireland the "island of saints and scholars."

The pre-Christian Irish had been famous as warriors but also as bards and musicians. They had already created in the immediately preceding centuries a series of great epic poems besides the beginnings of a folklore rich in mystical ideas and a popular music that was destined to affect all the surrounding nations. Christianity came to turn the energies of the Irish that had been spent to a considerable degree in war, almost entirely in the direction of the cultivation of the arts of peace and the spread of the Gospel. It is a striking characteristic of the Irish people down to our own day to take very seriously to heart whatever interests them and to devote themselves to it with an ardor that usually brings striking achievement in its train.

The enthusiasm with which this great work of Christianization and civilization was undertaken is almost incredible. It might be said that a devouring hunger for learning came over the people and at the same time a burning thirst for the spread of Christianity. For several centuries after the coming of St. Patrick to Ireland the most important portion of the history of the land is concerned not with kings and wars nor with politics or strife of any kind, but with the almost endless record of the peaceful activities of many hundreds of saints and the educational efforts of the thousands of teachers of Irish birth and training. They went forth from their native land to spend themselves for Christianity in countries that in those days particularly seemed far distant from home and to devote all their mental and physical energies for the benefit of those who were sitting in darkness beyond the light of the Gospel.

"A typical incident of the history of those times of Irish apostleship is found in the story of the landing of two Irish missionaries, Clement and Albinus, at Marseilles in the south of France sometime during the second or third generation after St. Patrick. They went through the streets crying aloud that they had wisdom to sell for all who cared to have it. When they were asked what they meant by such a hawking cry and what wares they had for purchase, they declared that they had Christian knowledge and learning which they wished to share with others. When it was further

demanded, what was the price they asked for their wares such as they were, they replied that they were beyond price but that they would gladly give them to all who cared to possess them. Christianity and learning went hand and hand with the Irish saints and scholars and they quite literally burned with ardor to share their possessions with others. The joy of imparting their knowledge and dispensing Christianity to those who would receive it, was worth all the trouble that there might be in the task and the satisfaction which they secured thereby more than repaid them.

It is for this work that the world owes a debt to the Irish. The value of their labors has been recognized especially in recent years by all those who have come to know of them. It has been appreciated very thoroughly that without such unselfish devotion to the cause as the Irish gave, civilization on the continent would have sunk ever so much lower than it actually did and the return of it would have been delayed for centuries beyond what it actually was. The Irish were the saviors of civilization. But they did much more than merely redeem the decadent conditions. They supplied gifts of their own to the newly rising civilization which add enormously to the debt that the world owes to them."*

Before describing in detail the work of the Irish in foreign lands and their part in restoring the

* Walsh, James J. - World's Debt to the Irish - Page 15-16

crumbling civilization of Rome and Greece, it might be well to pause here and try to determine just how this great Christian learning, which the Irish had developed to such heights, began in Ireland and also endeavor to trace its development.

There seems to be much uncertainty as to where the classical learning later developed in Ireland came from. Some claim that Patrick deserves the credit for the introduction of the classics into Ireland yet this seems very unlikely from what we have seen of Patrick's activity and what we know of his classical knowledge as evidenced in his Confession. It has also been suggested that some of the Britons or Gauls who accompanied St. Patrick brought these studies to Ireland, but Meyer thinks this most improbable and dismisses the idea that any missionaries whether Gallic or British introduced classical learning into Ireland. Meyer holds that the seeds of classical learning were sown in Ireland during the first and second decades of the fifth century by Gallic scholars who fled their own country owing to the invasion of the latter by the Goths and other barbarians. Ireland being without the pale of strife and invasion served as an ideal haven to those who were inclined to live the solitary life of a scholar.

It has been very carefully pointed out by Prof. Bury that St. Patrick did not introduce Christianity nor the beginnings of classical learning into Ireland, yet his

indirect influence must have been considerable. The very fact that Latin was the ecclesiastical language of the new religion gave it an importance and a dignity. St. Patrick would naturally help to diffuse a knowledge of ecclesiastical Latin at least in every part of the island which Christianity reached.* Besides in the training of the native ministry which formed such a large part of Patrick's work the study of Latin could not be neglected. Unable to give proper attention to the instruction of these ecclesiastical students, St. Patrick after about twenty years' peripatetic teaching established about 450 A.D. a school at Armagh of which St. Benin or Benignus was given charge.**

Although it is true that the primary aim of the school at Armagh was to train subjects for the priesthood and that there were classical schools in existence in certain localities due to the presence of Gallic scholars in Ireland, yet in this foundation at Armagh we have the first recorded attempt at the organization of instruction in Christian theology and classical learning in Ireland.

A great number of schools sprang up in the last half of the fifth century. These were not really monastic schools at first but merely ecclesiastical seminaries during the time of the First Order of Saints (440-534 A.D.).

The significance of these fifth century schools from the point of view of the present study lies in the fact

* Bury, J. B.- The Life of St. Patrict and His Place in History Page 217

** Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 26

that they were precursors of the great monastic schools which sprang up in such numbers in the sixth century. There is every reason for believing that it was in these early schools and by the labor of Gallic scholars and their pupils that the foundations were laid of that classical scholarship that drew the eyes of Europe upon Ireland during the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries.*

* Graham, Hugh -The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 27

IRISH MONASTICISM

Monasticism in general is a system of living that owes its origin to those tendencies of human nature which are summed up in the words mysticism and ascetism. Mysticism may be defined as the efforts to give effect to the craving for union with the Diety even in this life; and ascetism, as the effort to give effect to the hankering after an ever progressive purification of the soul, and an atoning for sin by the renunciation and self-denial of things lawful. In one form or another monasticism had appealed to the people of various countries long before it became associated with Christianity. In the early years of Christianity monasticism took a definite shape in Syria, Egypt, and Armenia. Thence it was brought to Rome about the middle of the Fourth century by Athanasius, the great champion of the divinity of Christ, by Honorius, the founder of the island monastery of Lerins; and by Cassian whose "Institutes" were a kind of mound for all the earlier monasteries of the West.*

As to the origin of Irish Monasticism opinions are divided: some have ascribed it to an Eastern origin, while others insist that it can be directly traced to Gaul. The most commonly accepted view is that of Mr. Willis Bund which ascribes to it a purely indigenous development. It seems clear that the first Celtic monasteries were merely settlements where the Christians lived together - priests, and laity, men and women and children alike - as a kind of religious clan.**

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 31

** Cath. Ency. - Irish Monasticism.- Vol.X - Page 473

An examination of Irish Monastic Rules reveals the fact that they are not identical with any Western or Eastern Code.* In the general severity of their regulations they are found, on comparison, to resemble the former rather than the latter. It is possible however that the ideas and literature of Gallic and Egyptian monasticism may have influenced to some extent the development of Irish monasticism.** This growth of monasticism although influenced by St. Patrick, cannot be attributed solely to his efforts. His life was too full of missionary labours to be given to the government or foundation of monasteries. That work was left to the rising generation; by them it was undertaken and nobly accomplished. Enda of Aran, Finnian of Clonard, Brendan of Clonfert, and their associates of the Second Order of the Irish Saints, were the men who first founded regular monasteries and monastic schools in Erin.***

When Monasticism became general in the sixth century most, if not all, of those ecclesiastical seminaries which we have listed as being founded in the fifth century, became monastic schools. Some of them such as Armagh attained a high degree of excellence ranking with Clonard, Bangor, and the other great schools which date from the sixth century. These schools were all established by Irishmen who received their own education for the most part in schools already in existence in Ireland.

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 32
** Cath. Ency. Vol. X Page 473
*** Healy, John - Saints and Scholars - Page 92

There is great controversy concerning the number of monasteries established in Ireland, D. P. Conyngham gives the names of 168 monasteries founded prior 900 A.D. But Hugh Graham argues that this list is incomplete since it had attributed four monasteries to St. Columba while Reeves found 37 monasteries founded by this energetic saint. Also it had attributed 2 monasteries to County Louth while Rev. L. P. Murray a recent reliable investigator maintained that 19 or 20 should be credited to this county.* Upon examination it is clear that the greater part of these monasteries were founded in the sixth century.

From what has been said about the spread of monasticism in Ireland in the sixth century it is evident that the whole organization of the Church in Ireland is being placed on a monastic basis. This being so it is only fitting that we now obtain some notion of the structure and practise of the Irish monastery.

In marked contrast with the other Western churches which were organized on a national and episcopal basis the Irish Church was tribal and monastic. This was quite natural. The conversion of the chieftain was followed by the conversion of the clansmen and a tribal character was thus given to the nascent church. At an early date the Irish church took a monastic form which accorded so well with the native social system. This is shown in the case of the monastery of Iona where Columba and thirteen of his successors were descended from a common ancestor, an Irish chief named Conall Gulban.**

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 37

** " " " " " " " " 53

The monastic family consisted of fratres: those of tried devotion were called seniores; those who were strong for labour were operarii fratres; and those under instruction were juniores, alumni or pueri familiares. Besides the congregation - collectio - of professed members there were usually present peregrini, sometimes called proselyti or hospites whose sojourn was of varied duration.

The number of officers was relatively small, the more important being the abbot, the prior, the episcopus, the scriba, and the Erinach or Airchinneach. The abbot was the superior of the monastic family and frequently had several houses under his supreme control. He generally lived at the mother house. The branch houses were governed by local superiors called priors who were subject to removal by the abbot. There was also a prior at the mother house who assisted the abbot and took his place in administration when his superior was absent. The prior in this latter capacity is sometimes styled custos monasterii, sometimes oeconomous and in the Irish Annals, Fertighis.*

The lands belonging to the monastery were usually managed by an officer called an erinach. The erinach, who was usually a layman, first deducted his own stipend and gave the residue for the purpose intended - the support of the monastery or the relief of the poor.

The monasteries derived their means of support from a variety of sources, the chief being: Lands, Tithes, Fees and Dues and Gifts.

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 54

By far the most important of all these means of revenue were the lands attached to the monastery. These lands called Termon lands in Ireland were tilled by the monks themselves and formed the staple support of the establishment. It was a maxim in all the primitive monasteries that the monks support themselves by the labor of their hands. Ordinarily the monastery was a self-supporting institution. The community produced everything they needed for food, clothing and shelter. They owed little to society but society owed much to them. There was no privileged class in the early monastery. All who were physically fit had to take part in the manual labor, nor were the scribes, nor even the abbot exempt.* Tithes, dues and gifts were also means of support. The Church in Ireland was always the companion of the People and so the sources of income fluctuated depending largely on the location of the monastery as well as its reputation.

The monastery including the whole group of monastic buildings was generally surrounded by a strong rampart. Sometimes this rampart was of earth (rath), othertimes of stone (caiseal). So much was the rampart a feature of the Irish monastery that we find it in connection with the monasteries founded by Irish monks in foreign lands. The monastery proper was the space enclosed by the rampart and included the church or churches, the oratories, a refectory, the kitchen, the school, the armarium - a chamber for the preservation of

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 57

books and literary apparatus, sometimes a special scriptorium the hospice or guest house, the cells for the monks and the officinae or workshops for the smith and the carpenter. Outside the rampart were the various other indispensable buildings connected with the monastery of which the storehouse and mill are the most important.

The structure of these early monasteries was of a simple and inexpensive character. Like the early Celtic churches, they were built at first of earth, wattles, or wood. It was not until the eighth century that stone buildings began to be substituted for wooden ones, as a protection against the ravages of the Dane. The simplicity and temporary character of these early foundations would account for the quickness with which monastic cities sprang up as well as for the fact that comparatively few remains of these monastic settlements are now to be seen.

The rules were rigid and the practices austere in these early Irish monasteries. Fasting, prayer, labour and study were the daily task of the monk in every Irish monastery. Strict obediance and humility was characteristic of the Irish monk. Moral courage was one of his assets. Silence and hospitality were practised. Dr. Healy pays these Irish monks this eloquent tribute: "Fasting, and prayer, labor and study are the daily task of the monks in every monastery. How well and unselfishly that toil was performed the history of Europe tells. The monks made roads, cleared the forests, and fertilized the desert. Their monasteries in Ireland were the cites of our cities.... They preserved for us the literary treasures of antiquity, they multiplied copies of the best and newest books;

they illumined them with loving care. They taught the children of rich and poor alike.... they were the greatest authors, painters, architects since the decline of the Roman Empire. They were the physicians of the poor, they served the sick in their hospitals and in their homes. And when the day's work was done in the fields or in the study, they praised God, and prayed for men who were unable or unwilling to pray for themselves. Ignorant and prejudiced men have spoken of them as an idle and useless race. They were in reality the greatest toilers and the greatest benefactors of humanity the world has ever known."*

* Healy, John - Saints and Scholars - Page 102, 103

IRISH MONASTIC SCHOOLS

In old pagan times, long before the arrival of St. Patrick, there were schools in Ireland taught by the Druids. In these schools the Irish language had been studied and the children were taught to write. All this is inferred from the discovery of the ogham tablets. There had also been professional schools for the training of brehons and bards where specific courses of study were prescribed and definite requirements fulfilled. From archaeological research it has also been shown that the carving, metal-work and all around handicraft of the pagan Irish gave evidence of a highly developed culture and civilization. It is folly therefore to suppose that Ireland newly converted to Christianity would cease to manifest this enthusiasm for learning which had characterized her pagan civilization. Not only did Irishmen continue to cultivate their native literature and to study her now Christianized arts but turned with equal zeal to the studies which St. Patrick and his followers brought with them as well as to those studies which Gallic scholars, forced to flee the ravages of the barbarians, brought with them to Erin. Thus when Christianity was introduced into Ireland where an ancient native culture was flourishing the new culture did not displace the old but rather combined with it to form a new type of culture which in course of time became at once both Irish and Christian. In the monastic schools everything that was not absolutely opposed to the ideals of Christianity was utilized to enrich the course of study. Thus the native laws, literature, music and art became the handmaid of Christianity.

No doubt that the primary aim of the Irish monastic school was the teaching and study of Christian theology, yet the humanisms were not neglected. The curriculum was comparatively broad including not only the study of the Sacred Scriptures with the commentaries of the Greek and Latin Fathers, but also the study of the pagan authors of Greece and Rome. Nor was the study of the Irish language and literature neglected. Science in the modern sense of the word was unknown, but as regards Geography, Computation and Astronomy the Irish Monastic Schools were quite as far advanced as any in Europe and certainly far ahead of their neighbors. At least in the ninth century philosophy and dialectic were eagerly studied. Art too flourished, especially the illumination of manuscripts, various ornamental forms of metal work and stone carving.

The literary taste already acquired through a study of native literature was entirely favorable to the appreciation and enjoyment of the great authors of antiquity. Besides the Christianity of the Irish monk was sufficiently robust to prevent any of those scruples of conscience which were said to have haunted the continental monk who loved his Virgil. Indeed the tales of Homer's gods would be regarded by the Irish purely from a literary and artistic standpoint and could have little religious significance for them since there was little in common between the paganism of Greece and Rome and such remnants of paganism as still survived in Ireland. The Irish Christian not dwelling within the confines of Roman civilization would not be as likely to be influenced as his continental neighbor. The

classics were banned by the early Church Fathers with such gusto that when the fall of the Empire occurred and only the Christian Church remained with a teaching organization the classics were neglected and relegated to the top shelves in the monasteries as conducive to sin and unChristian desires. In addition the anxiety of the Irish monk to obtain more perfect copies of the Scriptures was an additional and perhaps more powerful incentive to make himself familiar with the classical forms of Greek and Latin.

It is due to the efforts of Irishmen that the classics of Greece and Rome were kept alive during the Dark Ages. Here alone in all of Western Europe was Latin and Greek kept free from colloquialisms and studied in its original and pure form. An examination of the writings of Irish scholars of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries revealed numerous quotations from and reminiscences of classical Latin authors, thus we have incontestable evidence of an intimate acquaintance with classical Latin. The main aim in the study of Greek as far as these Irish scholars were concerned was a preparation for the study of the Scriptures. In their knowledge and exposition of Holy Scriptures Ireland surpassed all countries. We have various references of foreign scholars journeying to Erin to pursue this study.

De Jubainville declares that in the ninth century the Irish scholars were the only persons in Western Europe who knew Greek. Traube claims that in the time of Charles the Bald

at least the Irish were the sole representatives of Greek scholarship: "they could read and write Greek, they could transcribe it, nay, they even ventured occasionally to make Greek verses."*

The love of music so noticeable in the old days of Ireland did not dwindle at all in Christian times but won the great fame for Ireland in psalm-singing etc. which now was necessary in the service of the Church. So developed was the study of music in Ireland that we have noted from Flood twelve different instruments in use and professional names for nine different types of performers. O'Curry says "If ever there was a people gifted with a musical soul and sensibility in a higher degree than another I would venture to assert that the ancient Gaedhil of Ireland were that people." It is indeed not without significance that the harp is the national symbol. During the long period when learning flourished Irish professors and teachers of music would seem to have been as much in request as teachers of literature and philosophy. In the middle of the seventh century Gertrude (daughter of Pepin) when abbess of Niville in Belgium employed Foillan and Ultan brothers of St. Fursey to instruct her nuns in Psalmody. The monastery of St. Gall founded by the Irish saint Cellach was noted far and wide as a music school when St. Gall died in 645. Irish saints also contributed much to hymnology by their compositions.

Summarizing the history of Irish music prior to the close of the ninth century Flood says: "The Irish were acquainted with the Ogam music tablature in pre-Christian ages; they had battle marches, dance tunes, folk songs, chants and

hymns in the fifth century; they were the earliest to adopt the neums or neumatic notation for the plain chant of the Western Church; they modified and introduced Irish melodies into the Gregorian Chant; they had an intimate acquaintance with the diatonic scale long before it was perfected by Guido of Arezzo. They were the first to employ harmony and counter-point; they had quite an array of bards and poets; they employed blank verse, elegaic rhymes, consonant, assonant, inverse, burthen, dissyllabic, trisyllabic, and quadrisyllabic rhymes, not to say anything of the caoines, laments, elegies, metrical romances, etc.; they had a world-famed school of harpers, and finally they diffused musical knowledge over Europe."*

It has been shown above that there was a native art in Ireland before the introduction of Christianity and that the pagan Irish exhibited considerable artistic skill in their bronze, silver, gold and other metal work as the speciments still preserved in our museums go to prove. From the pagan period we have numerous articles and workings that show that the pagan artist possessed both skill and taste to a high degree. The character of the arts introduced into Ireland with Christianity was therefore grafted upon and modified by the native arts while new variations in design were introduced from the Continent by missionaries and foreign artists that came to Ireland to study.

Irish art attained its highest excellence in four branches, namely, writing and illumination of manuscripts, metal work and stone carving.

* Flood, W. H. G. - History of Irish Music - Page 19, 20

The Irish style of writing played an important part in the development of that style which was practised for centuries in England and to some extent on the Continent. The Irish it is true modelled their national script on the Roman half-uncial hand but with their own innate sense of beauty and form they produced from it a handsome literary hand which culminated in the native half-uncial writing as seen in perfection in the Book of Kells and contemporary manuscripts of the later part of the seventh century. This Irish script is so characteristic and distinguishable that those manuscripts of the Dark Ages that have been recently discovered can be attributed to Irish scribes solely on evidence of the hand-writing.

Shortly after the Irish monks became skilled penmen they began to illuminate their books with brilliant colors which they learned to combine into elaborate and harmonious designs. This art reached its most perfect stage of development at the close of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century The monks were wont to lavish all the wealth of their artistic skill on books containing the whole or portions of the Holy Scriptures. As instances of this style of illuminated manuscripts the Psalter of Columcille, the Book of Dimma, the Book of Armagh, and above all the Book of Kells. While each of these books has many merits the book which has compelled the admiration, yet defied the imitation of every European artist is the Book of Kells. Describing this venerable volume which was written and illuminated about 850, Sir Edward O'Sullivan writes as follows: "Its weird and commanding beauty; its subdued and goldless

colouring; the baffling intricacy of its fearless designs the clean unwavering sweep of rounded spiral; the creeping undulations of serpentine forms that writhe in artistic profusion throughout the mazes of its decorations; the strong and legible minuscule of the text; the quaintness of its striking portraiture; the unwearied reverence and patient labour which brought it into being, all of which combined to make the Book of Kells, have raised this ancient volume to a position of abiding pre-eminence amongst the illuminated MSS of the world."*

We have referred to the fact that the pagan Irish were skilled workmen in metal. This class of work received a new impetus with the introduction of Christianity. Just as the pre-Christian craftsmen exercised their skill in ornamenting shields, swords and the like so the Christian artists, the majority of whom were ecclesiastics made crosses, croziers, chalices, shrines, etc. For real artistic skill the most admired specimens are the Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch and the Cross of Cong. Artistic skill in metal work was brought to its highest development and degree of excellence in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The skill of the Irish artists in stone carving is seen at its best in the great stone crosses of which about fifty-five remain in different parts of Ireland. These crosses have a style of ornamentation similar to that of the manuscripts and of the metal work. These crosses for the most part have

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 158-159

groups of figures representing various events in Sacred History such as The Fall of Man, Noah in the Ark, the Crucifixion of Our Lord, etc. Joyce explains the purpose of this picturization in this way: "These sculptures were "iconographic." that is to say, they were intended to bring home to the minds of the unlettered people the truths of religion and the facts of Scripture history by vivid illustration;..... No doubt the preachers, in their discourses, directed attention to these representations; and perhaps they often lectured standing at the foot of the cross with the people ranged in front, the preacher pointing to the several sculptured groups as he went on, and as occasion required. It is probable that the groups were painted in colors so as to bring them out more distinctly."* Henry O'Neill says that the Irish artists made color an essential portion of their designs.

**"Irish art continued good up to the twelfth century, thence it rapidly deteriorated and became extinct about the fifteenth century. But who can think that a nation that worked in silver 4000 years ago; that had a parliament five centuries before the foundation of Rome or the institution by Lycurgus of the Spartan commonwealth; that was never invaded by Rome; that conquered the Danes at the very time that Canute the Dane ascended the English throne; who that knows what Ireland was formerly but must see how probable it is that ancient Ireland excelled in Art? I see no reason for supposing that St. Patrick

* Early Irish Catholic Art - Article by Joseph Gurn in Columbia, March 1929 - Page 37

** The following quoted from The Sculptured Crosses of Ancient Ireland -- Henry O'Neill -- Page 2

did anything to civilize Ireland. The style of Irish art shows that it did not come from Rome. The excellence assigned to the Book of Kildare, and displayed in the Book of Kells and other Irish Art Works, shows that the style must have been cultivated for ages before it could have been brought to such perfection. The actual remains are very numerous; they are incomparably the most exquisite speciments of ancient illumination in the Royal Library at Paris in the British Museum, in Trinity College and other great collections; they are in fact unapproachable and probably were never approached as a thorough development of sound ornamental art, as a display of harmony and beauty in composition and colouring combined with an almost superhuman delicacy and completeness in execution. Remembering these facts I cannot think that Art began in the fifth century and attained perfection at its birth.

What I have said respecting the Ancient Irish MSS Illuminations I would extend to the works in stone and metal. The excellence, the amazing labouriousness and perfection of these works of Art, indicate a very long and a very patient cultivation. The style of all is the same - unmistakably Irish. It could not have come from Rome as Rome never had it. It originated in Ireland and extended thence to Great Britain and the Continent of Europe."

We cannot close our discussion of the curriculum of the Irish monastic schools without a brief reference to its limitations which are especially noteworthy in the case of mathematics and other secular sciences. The most that can be

said in favour of the teachers of this early period is that they willingly imparted all the mathematical and scientific knowledge of their time. But the actual amount of such knowledge possessed by Western Europe prior to the tenth century was relatively small as compared with the later Middle Ages not to speak of modern times.

Prior to the tenth century arithmetic was essentially the art of computation. It was largely devoted to computing Easter. The method of reckoning was necessarily crude and little progress was possible while the cumbersome Roman system of notation made computation with large numbers well nigh impossible. In truth it was not until the introduction of the Arabic system of notation and Hindoo methods through Arabic influence that there was much possibility of progress in arithmetic.

Algebra was apparently unknown to the Irish monks and was probably not introduced into Europe until the twelfth century. A knowledge of Geometry in our sense of the word did not exist in Western Europe. In Ireland Geometry was a practical study in the main as is suggested by an examination of their style of ornamentation. The theoretical knowledge of Geometry did not extend beyond the narrow limits of Capella, Cassiodorus and Isadore of Seville.*

If the mathematical science of Geometry was still undeveloped in the West geography, topography, and cosmography made up the deficiency. It was but natural that the Irish monks, the greatest voyagers of their time, should be interested in the study of foreign lands. Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis -

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 166

a description of Palestine and Bede's Ecclesiastical History are the only sources from which we gather information of the geography, Christian antiquities and customs of Palestine until the Crusades gave Western Europe a more acute and active interest in that distant, inhospitable region. There is a curious geographical poem and a tenth century map, both the work of Irishmen, which have come down to give us further information concerning the state of geographical knowledge up to the eleventh century.

Astronomy had a double interest for the Irish monks. Being great travellers in an age when they had no compass to direct their way the "study of the stars" was a matter of practical interest and possibly they were more observant of the courses of the heavenly bodies than the majority of us to-day. Again the ability to compute the date of Easter was a matter of great importance in ecclesiastical circles in those days. The controversies which centered around the Easter question caused many Irish monks to give special attention to practical methods of computing the date of Easter. They were also led to examine the history of the different cycles in use and finally they were led to inquire into the theoretical aspect of the science of Astronomy. Among the Irish saints we number Virgilius, Dicuil and Dungal as great astronomers. Of all the secular sciences Astronomy was perhaps the most popular with Irish monastic scholars, the superiority of whose scholarship in this regard is acknowledged by all writers of the early Middle Ages.*

* Graham, Hugh - The Early Irish Monastic Schools - Page 168

Thus we conclude that the course of studies in the Irish monastic schools included:

1) Vernacular Studies: The Irish language, its grammar, metrics, literature both secular and religious, prose and poetry, history, antiquities, etc.

2) Christian Studies: Theology, especially the study of the Scriptures with the commentaries of the Fathers thereon, and in the ninth century at least the study of Dialectics and Philosophy was pursued with success.

3) Classical Studies: Acquaintance with several Latin and Greek authors of the classical period. Superior knowledge of Latin and a good working knowledge of Greek.

4) Aesthetic Studies: Cultivation of Art and Music. This includes illumination, metal work and stone carving.

5) Scientific Studies: All the scientific knowledge of the time in Western Europe, special emphasis on Astronomy.

Thus we see that the course of studies of the early Irish monastic school was much more varied in scope and fuller in content than the Trivium and Quadrivium as taught in contemporary Europe.

The true worth and value of the Irish monastic course of study may be in no small way determined by the number of great scholars these schools produced. Virgilius, who lived in the eighth century, was one of the few men who cultivated the profane sciences in his day. When he maintained that the sun and moon passed under the earth, and that there must be inhabitants on the other side, he was denounced by Boniface, the Papal Legate, for promulgating false doctrines. Virgilius however explained his doctrine to the satisfaction of the Pope for he retained his see as bishop of Salzburg until his death. Dicuil is another famous Irish scholar. His chief claim to fame rests on a Latin tract entitled De Mensura Orbis Terrarum. He was the foremost geographer of his time being the first to give authentic information about Iceland and the Faroe Islands. He has also left us an astronomical work in prose and verse, showing his versatility. Dungal, another ninth century scholar, was distinguished not only as a theologian and poet but also as an astronomer and schoolmaster. Emperor Lothair feeling that true teaching was shaken to its very foundations because of the extreme carelessness and indolence of certain superiors issued an Edict that all students from Milan, Brescia, Lodi, Bergamo, Novara, Vercelli, Tortona, Acqui, Genoa, Asti, and Como should assemble at Pavia under the supervision of Dungal. Dungal's controversy with Claudius also marks him as a great theologian. His gift of books to the library of Bobbio show him a man of literary attainments and interests.

Two other outstanding Irish scholars of the ninth century were Sedulius and John Scotus Eriugena. The former was a distinguished poet having written about ninety poets and a learned grammarian having written a tract, "Artes Puticii Grammatici" which also shows a knowledge of Greek. He is no less noted as a scribe and as a writer on other subjects, particularly on political government as his treatise, "De Rectoribus Christianis," will conclusively prove. This treatise is in reality the first systematic contribution of the Middle Ages to the theory of political government and should rank in importance with St. Thomas's "De Regimine Principis" and with Dante's "De Monarchia."* John Scotus Eriugena was by far the greatest Irish scholar of the ninth century and in many ways the most remarkable man of his age. Recognized by Charles the Bald as a remarkable linguish he was placed at the head of the Palace School. The greatest scholars of France at the time were unable to translate the Greek writings of the pseudo-Dionysius for Pope Paul I. This task was finally entrusted to Eriugena and he produced a satisfactory version.

Great as was his fame as a linguist his reputation as a philosopher is still greater. His philosophical speculations gave rise to discussions and controversies which even to the present day occupy the attention of the greatest thinkers. In his own day his views were nothing short of sensational. No one can doubt his ability as a scholar and original thinker. According to De Wülf, "he must be regarded as one of the most striking personalities in the world

of culture and learning in the Middle Ages. He was far in advance of his time. While his contemporaries were only lisping in philosophy and his successors for centuries did little more than discuss a small number of disconnected philosophical questions, Eriugena in the ninth century worked out a complete philosophical synthesis.... He was at once a scholar and a man of genius. What was altogether unique is the mith century, he knew Greek of which Alcuin scarcely knew the alphabet."*

The scope of Irish scholarship may in some measure by judged by the scholastic ability and scholarly attainments of the men that scholarship produced. The superiority of Irish classical learning is further demonstrated by a comparative study of the writings that can be directly attributed to Irish students and teachers. These Irish scholars were not merely missionaries and representatives of Christianity but as Zimmer so clearly points out: "they were instructors in every branch of science and learning of the time, possessors and bearers of a higher culture than was at that time to be found anywhere on the Continent, and can surely claim to have been the pioneers,- to have laid the corner stone of western culture on the Continent."**

* De Wülf,, Maurice - History of Medieval Philosophy- Page 167-168

** Zimmer, Heinrich - The Irish Element in Medieval Culture - Page 130, 131.

IRELAND AND THE MAKING OF BRITAIN

About this time Ireland was famed far and wide as the intellectual leader of Christendom. To her shores to her schools and monasteries flocked all the students of the world. Here learning flourished as in no other land, here were the world's most brilliant scholars, here were free schools free learning and free books. The one predominant passion of this people on the very edge of the civilized world seems to have been the acquirement and circulation of learning and culture. The celebrity of Ireland as the university of the West and the home of the more erudite and speculative of nations was thus bruited over the known world, which henceforth hailed the western isle as the intellectual leader of Christendom and the Island of Saints and Scholars. Of that enduring preeminence Darmesteter felicitously says: "The classic tradition to all appearances dead in Europe burst into flower in the isle of Saints and the Renaissance began in Ireland seven centuries before it was known in Italy. For three hundred years Ireland was the asylum of the higher learning which took sanctuary there from the uncultivated states in Europe. At one time Armagh, the religious capital of Christian Ireland was the metropolis of civilization."

It is true that Greece in the heyday of her power hardly drew more powerfully to itself the adventurous intellects of foreign nations than Ireland during the centuries of its supremacy. Not Britains alone but Romans, Italians, Egyptians, Gauls, Germans, Picts, Saxons, and natives of other countries

flocked to Ireland as well if we can at all judge from the litany of Aengus of Culdee in which are invoked the intercession of many hundreds of saints who were buried and venerated in Ireland. Other sources such as an engraving of stone which marks the grave of Seven Romans (VII Romani) near the church of St. Brecan in the great isle of Arran give evidence of the number of foreign students who crossed the seas to obtain a liberal education in the great Irish academies.

After the year 635 the Anglo-Saxons in particular crossed over to Ireland to enjoy the advantages offered by its schools. Bede provides striking testimony as to the numbers of English students in Ireland and the hospitality extended them. He tells us that many of the English nation were living in Ireland, whither they had repaired either to cultivate the sacred studies or to lead a life of greater strictness. Some became monks while others were pleased to apply themselves to reading and study going about from school to school through the cells of the masters. But all were none the less cheerfully received and encouraged by the Irish, who supplied them gratis with books and instruction. Bede and others offer no end of testimony to the last mentioned fact, for which Ireland has been and should rightfully be honored. Learning was their predominant passion and to others, who manifested any tendency to study they offered all manner of encouragement and help and even went so far as to give them free books free board and clothing. They seem to have

felt a mission in life and did all in their power to realize it. Their thirst for knowledge and desire to spread this learning throughout Christendom marks them as a very wonderful civilizing force to which all the world owes an enormous debt.

Throughout all these years a continual stream of scholars desirous of the most liberal and complete education that the world could offer flowed into Ireland. Here were the arts and sciences in all their abundance. Here princes as well as monks sought learning prostrate at the feet of some learned Irish monk. This going to Ireland was not a matter of one short generation. It became traditional and continuous. The rise of numerous Irish foundations in Britain and on the Continent naturally served to make the long journey to Ireland superfluous and diminished the volume of those who resorted thither. But the attraction of Ireland as the university of the West long remained potent, and foreign students were found in Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well as in the sixth and seventh. Aldhelm's petulant outburst in the seventh century over the students who neglected the English schools and flocked to Ireland is matched by parallel testimony in the eleventh century. "Why does Ireland," writes Aldhelm to three English students just returned from Ireland, "pride herself on a sort of priority in that such numbers of students flock there from England?" On the other hand we have the biographer of Sulger in the eleventh century telling us how he went to Ireland to study "after the fashion of his ancestors."*

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 61

We have thus brought up before our eyes an Ireland whose authentic right to the varied titles traditionally bestowed upon her as the hearth-stone of civilization, the school of the West, and the habitation of learning, is based on a living reality and not on an idle dream. There was hardly a city or clan in Ireland that had not its schools. There was hardly a valley, a hill, or an isle that did not resound to the voices of teacher and student. And all this ardor of learning, this everlasting contest of mind with mind, this endless catechizing and philosophizing and multiplication of books and succession of dynasties of hereditary teachers and of school on school was peculiar and unique to Ireland alone, save where Irishmen sought to reconstruct abroad and gradually succeeded in there reconstructing the intellectual life and world they had known at home.*

That Ireland should have been the retreat and nursery of learning and the center of intellectual activity while the rest of Europe was the prey of barbarism would appear to have been distinction enough. Little reproach could have been cast upon her had she been content to enjoy the fruits of her own civilization, sharing those fruits the while with such foreign visitors as sought them on Irish soil. But the fact remains that she was not content.

At an early period Irish sanctity and culture became animated by an ardent spirit of proselytism and missionary zeal. The converts of one generation became the apostles of another. Fervent monks longed with great longing to carry

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 73

beyond the sea their methods of asceticism. They left the land of their birth, radiant with tender associations, blooming like a garden with the cultivation of the arts and sciences, to become "monks and exiles for the sake of Christ and for the benefit of their souls." Nor was the Irish love of adventure and travel abroad lacking in these early missionaries.*

To leave home and kindred for the inaccessible crag, the high mountain, the bare desert, the ocean-swept isle, seemed to these ascetic Irishmen the literal following in the footsteps of the Lord. To seek out remote tribes and work among them, preaching, teaching, spending themselves in behalf of them, building them up into Christian nations, was again work such as Christ commanded and his disciples performed. And they communicated this spirit to their disciples and thus set going a moral energy that carried Europe forward for centuries and made Christianity synonomous with civilization.

Ireland succeeded in retaining the heroic spirit of its pagan youth and accomodating it to its later Christian ideals. The fierce courage of a Cuchulain was changed into the spiritual heroism of a Columcille. The superterrestial zeal of the missionary and monk is foreshadowed in the unyielding resolution of the pagan warrior. These early Irish monks looked on life as a warfare, and themselves as soldiers, trained and armed for spiritual combat, and they responded to the spiritual call of religion, of learning and of liberty, as they had before answered to the martial call of bard and king. They were called ascetics, or athletes, which is the

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 95

very meaning of the Greek word, and they loved to "make a record," and records they made in abundance as we shall see as we proceed.*

However when the Irish missionaries left Ireland to cultivate and Christianize Scotland the task appeared tremendous. Yet to clearly understand why this conversion was so quickly accomplished we shall first delineate the steps by which the military conquest of Scotland was completed.

Irish Scots had crossed the Strath-na-Maelle of the Gaels, the northern arm of the Mare Hebernicum of the Romans, and the North Channel of modern days, and settled in that part of Caledonia which the Romans called Vespasiania some hundreds of years before Angle, or Saxon or Jute had appeared on the run of civilization.

From at least the second century onwards Irish expeditions crossed from Ireland into North Britain and gradually conquered and colonized the south-western parts of the country. The forces which crossed into Scotland became larger and larger until the Irish were firmly established there. Sixty kings of the Irish race reigned in Alba or Scotland during a period of nearly eight centuries (502-1286). During that period Irish culture and the Irish language became established over all Scotland, and the intercourse between Scotland and the other Irish provinces of Munster,Connaught,Ulster,Leinster,and Meath, was as constant as was the intercourse between the inland provinces themselves. So Scotia Majar as Ireland was

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 97-98

sometimes called and Scotia Minorformed a single country and nation of six provinces each with separate kings of whom one was the high-king or Ard-ri, each speaking the same tongue, and each looking back on a national history common to them all.

In this conquest of the northern half of Britain the role of spiritual proconsul was played by the famous Columcille. With a score of streamlets from Ireland's bluest blood uniting in his veins, richly endowed in body and mind, of great height and powerful in physique, with hair curling like the ringlets of a Greek God, with face broad and comely, eyes gray and luminous, a voice resonant, musical and deep, that could be heard at the distance of 1500 paces, a lion-hearted being whose energy, glowing with steady fire, would not permit him to spend even the space of an hour without some occupation. Columcille left an astonishing record of performance behind him and still looms over the fourteen centuries that divide us as one of the most impressive figures of the Middle Ages.*

Columcille was born in 521 at Gartan, Co Donegal, Ireland, of royal descent. He studied under a tutor or foster-father, a priest named Cruithnechan. When sufficiently advanced in letters he entered the monastic school of Maville. Afterwards he left Maville and became the pupil of an aged bard, Gemman. On leaving him Columcille entered the monastery of Clonard governed at the time by Fininan, a man remarkable for his sanctity and learning. Here he advanced in learning and was promoted to the priesthood. Here he became one of those twelve Clonard disciples known in subsequent history as the

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 117

Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

From Clonard Columcille passed on to the school of Mobhi at Glasnevin near Dublin whither he seems to have been accompanied by Ciaran Comgall and Cainnech. The plague of 544 visited Ireland while Columba was at Mobhi and it fell heavily on the community, which numbered about fifty members. Columcille as a precautionary measure went northward and, shortly after received from his cousin, Prince of Aileach and later monarch of Ireland, the site of a monastery which he called Derry. Here in 546 when he was twenty five years of age, Columcille founded the famous church and school which remained so dear to him in after life.

During the sixteen years interval between 546 and 562, when Columcille departed for Iona, he established a great number of other monasteries and schools in Ireland, of which 37 are clearly marked, among them Kells, Swords, Drumcliff, Screen, Kilgrass, and Grumcolumb. He was at this time at the height of his powers and enjoyed a reputation second to none in Ireland. His activity was prodigious and opposition appears to have kindled it into a fiercer flame.

His intense love of Scripture and upholding of the right of sanctuary led to the battle of Culdreimhne in 561. In this battle 3000 lives were lost and as a penance Columcille determined on exile forever from Ireland which he had filled with arms and bloodshed. He was determined to convert in Scotland as many souls as had fallen at Culdreimhne. Adamnan his chief biographer claims that the missionary enterprise was

voluntary. "Pro Christo peregrinari volens, enavigit," is Adamnan's statement with which Bede's expression "ex quo ipse praedicaturus abiit" is in keeping.

Prompted by a desire to carry the Gospel to a pagan nation and to win souls to God, Columba departed in his forty fourth year from Ireland. He and his twelve companions crossed the sea in a currach of wickerwork covered with hides landing at Iona on the eve of Pentecost, May 12, 563. He and his brethren proceeded at once to erect their humble dwellings consisting of a church, a refortory, and cells, constructed of wattles and rough planks.

The missionary labors of Columcille in Scotland, in collaboration with his devoted colleagues, extended over the remaining period of his life. The island of Hy was donated to him by King Conall, his kinsman, and there he established his celebrated monastery of Iona. The Scoti or Irish already in Scotland were Christians; the Picts were not. Hence the conversion of these latter formed the grand project for the exercise of missionary exertion and Columcille applied himself with characteristic energy to the task. He visited the Pictish king in his fortress, won his esteem, overcame the opposition of his ministers and planted Christianity in the province. He lived thirty four years at Iona, and it is with his work with the island as a center and with his life after he had gone there that the biography of Adammen mainly deals.

Inspired by the example of their untiring ambitious abbot the brethren at Iona accomplished great things during and indeed after the life of Columcille. "He could not,"

says Adamnan,"spend the space of even one hour without study or prayer, writing or some other holy occupation. So incessantly was he engaged might and day in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching that the burden of each of these austerities would seem to be beyond the power of all. human endurance. And still in all these he was beloved by all; for the holy joy ever beaming from his face revealed the joy and gladness with which the Holy Spirit filled his inmost soul."*

Columcille had a passion for writing books and spend most of his time in the scriptorium,yet he led a life of solid hard work not disdaining to assist the brethren in the manual labor of building, rowing and dragging. His last occupation in life was copying the scriptures. The total number of works written by Columcille must have been great. The Lismore life credits him with 300 books and there is a medieval tradition that he left a book to every church he founded.

The spirit of Columcille pervaded Iona long after his death and later disciples finished the work of freeing Scotland giving her self-government and completely Hibernicizing her cultural institutions which Columcille had so nobly undertaken. Of the multitude of other men-missionaries and kings, soldiers, statesmen and scholars - who aided, supplemented and succeeded Columcille in the work not merely of Christianizing but of colonizing and Hibernicizing Scotland, little can be said. There were none who

*Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 138

were not wholly Irish. The missionaries of civilization in other countries have been of diverse nationalities. In England they were Irish, Roman and Greek. In France they were Greek, Roman Hebrew and Irish. Scotland had no saint, no prophet, no king, no leader among the people who was not an Irishman. Irish speech and Irish civilization were to put the seal of Irish authority so completely on Scotland that even in modern eyes it remains in many respects more Gaelic and Irish than the inland provinces of the motherland. To other lands Irishmen brought Christianity and culture. To Scotland they brought the whole Gaedhaltacht, and dividing Britain almost into halves, added the northern portion as a sixth Irish province to the five other provinces of Ireland and called the whole Scotia.*

While Irishmen in North Britain were bending their energies to the work of conquering, colonizing and civilizing Caledonia, another conquest was going forward, chiefly under the direction of Irishmen of the center and south. Had there been no Anglo-Jute-Saxon invasions of Great Britain these two Irish conquests would in all likelihood have been decisive of the future of the island. The Gael with smaller strength to draw from was finally conquered. There was also another reason and a potent one. It was at this period that the Gaels of Ireland were turning their backs on the mirage of military glory and were preparing to spend themselves in the nobler engagement against the forces of ignorance and heathenism. From the time of Patrick there is no record of any raiding expedition going forth from the Gaedhaltacht.

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 156

In the early days the part of Great Britain known as Wales and even Somerset, Devon and Cornwall had been under the dominion of the Irish kings. We have shown above that often the kings had two homes one in Ireland the other in Wales. When Christianity was introduced this intercourse between the two countries did not cease but continued. The Rev. W. Basil Jones summing up his researches on the subject in his Vestiges of the Gael in Gwynedd" came to the conclusion that the Irish occupied the whole of Anglesey, Carnavon, Merionetti, and Cardigan.

Dr. Jones's work was brought out in 1851 and in it he showed that Irishmen were in possession of North Wales at the time of the collapse of Roman rule in Britain. The invasion and extent of the settlement of the Irish in South and West Britain are established by the discovery of Ogham inscriptions. More than five-sixths of the known inscriptions have been found in Ireland itself, thus establishing Ogham as a purely Irish form of writing. Of the 360 Ogham tablets found, 300 were found in the counties of Kerry Cork, and Waterford. Scotland has sixteen ; the Isle of Man has six; in Devon and Cornwall there are five; Wales has over thirty.

During the latter part of the Irish occupation that part of Britain now called Wales was largely Christian. Christianity had been gradually diffused amongst the ancient Britons during the Roman occupation. The efforts of Roman priests were supplemented during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries by the devoted labors of Celtic missionaries, both Irish and Cymric, of whom nearly 500 names still remain on record.

The incessant intercommunication of the Irish and Welsh saints at this time in Britain, joined with the paucity of the Welsh records, make it difficult to tell which of them were originally Irish and which Welsh. To the period succeeding the fall of the Roman is ascribed the foundation of many great Celtic monasteries in Wales.

In the early days of Irish Christianity the Irish are usually considered to have turned to Wales for instruction. Greco-Roman secular knowledge as well as a first acquaintance with Christianity had passed to the Irish through Roman Britain. But when Britain ceased to be Roman the Britons had all they could do to preserve existence in the face of the foes that surrounded them. Neither as soldiers nor as politicians or churchmen did they show initiative.

It was not until the sixth century when the Irish church was in its first bloom and strength and just beginning its great missionary movement, that Wales showed signs of awakening. Wales therefore got her strength from Ireland and fell directly under the guidance and nourishment of Irish saints and missionaries.

Her culture is Irish culture, her language was for a long time Irish. All her institutions are headed by Irishmen. She too can truly be claimed as a province of Ireland as much as Scotland. This Irish predominence and influence in Wales gradually diminished yet until the year 1018 their land had an Irish ruler or king. Intercourse between Scotland and Ireland was much easier hence we can account for Ireland's more sustained influence in the Northern part of Britain.

When we consider the energy and intrepidity manifested by the Irish monks in so many different places through the long period of their apostolic mission, we are confronted by their singular delay and hesitancy in organizing the conversion of the English. The Saxons, Angles and Jutes began to arrive in England previous to 449 A.D. No organized Irish mission appeared among them till 635. Thus a period of two centuries was allowed to elapse before the Irish sought to win these new peoples to Christianity. What were the reasons underlying this singular delay?

In this attitude of aloofness the Irish were not alone. Gaulish missionaries - whose negligence Pope Gregory later rebuked, showed great reluctance in respect to teaching to the invaders of Britain for in a letter of introduction which Augustine brought from Gregory to Queen Brunhilda at Orleans we gather that applications from the English for help and conversion had been made in vain to neighboring priests.*

These invaders descended upon the Roman provinces of Rome and so ruthlessly rooted them out that subsequent English history has not at all been influenced by Roman culture and civilization. As the invading Anglo-Saxons advanced the Briton withdrew. The antipathy excited in the breast of the Romanized Briton became an insuperable barrier to the blending or association of the races, and receding towards the West before the violence of their invaders the Britons carried with them their whole organization of government and society. Thus was the Anglo-Saxon invader condemned to remain as much the primeval savage amid the noble monuments of Roman refinement and power as on the

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 196

wastes of Jutland.

So cruel and inhuman were these ruthless invaders that they appeared as monsters in the eyes of neighboring peoples. None dared venture into their midst lest he be eaten alive for they were not unused to cannibal practises. For a century and a half they lived a people totally isolated from civilization. They had not improved in the presence of the Roman monuments of art but seem to have been mystified by them refusing to dwell in the placed from which they had driven the Briton. The excavations of these early Roman villages show that they were completely sacked; not so much as a coin has been found there. The Anglo-Saxons must have dwelt near them and day by day carried off the treasures of these old villages till nothing remained save the bare walls and foundations.

Contact with civilization was necessary if the Anglo-Saxon was to be raised from his degradation. He himself provided conclusive proof that of himself the barbarian could do nothing. His paganism had grown coarser deeper darker; his political confusions and convulsion more hopeless; his tendency more savage and restless; his culture is an absolute blank. Bede has no word on this period so deeply had it fallen into the abyss of barbarism.* Whatever the Anglo-Saxons have since become they are indebted to an influence external to themselves. Had it not been for Christianity they must have remained forever in this ancient barbarism, making no improvement but sinking deeper into confusion from age to age. It brought them not only higher hopes but literature, arts and science in its train.**

* Fitzpatrick, B. - Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 200

** " " " " " " " " " 203

Preface to Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, Rolls Series IV, edited by J. S. Brewer.

To Rome we must look for the first attempt to carry Christianity to the English. It is very much to the honor of the great Pope Gregory that burdened as he was with the cares of a world in travail, he should still concern himself with the rescue of these distant barbarians, before any of their neighbors showed disposition to lend a helping hand to them. Accordingly Augustine was sent to promote the hazardous work of conversion. He did succeed in winning the people of Kent by first converting Ethelbert their ruler but upon his death they lapsed so violently back into Paganism that Augustine and his followers were forced to flee for their lives, only Lawrence was held, and this because of a dream. Thus the conversion of the Roman missionaries was only skin deep.

It was at this crucial period that the Irish missionaries appeared on the scene and started a more enduring movement of conversion. For it was they who with strong hands put the bit and bridle on the wild English tribes, tamed their savagery, kindled into flame the human spark within them, and led them despite themselves along the path of Christian civilization. The work was prolonged and suffered many setbacks, from the natural backwardness and brutality inherent in a savage population, from Danish inroads, from unceasing tribal conflicts, and from pestilence and famine. But these great Irishmen persevered and made their work permanent. Where the Roman had signally failed the Irishman signally succeeded and wherever he took the work in hand the English never looked back. In the work of these Irishmen English history and English civilization find written their book of Genesis.*

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain -Page 206

"The men who really plowed and harrowed the soil which was lying fallow among the masculine and vigorous peoples of northern and central England, of Northumbria and Mercia, were not Augustine's monks, but, as we have seen, the never-tired, resourceful and sympathetic spiritual children of St. Columba, St. Aidan and their disciples."*

The call that brought the Irish missionaries among the Anglo-Saxon tribes came from Oswald, the native ruler of the Northumbrians. Oswald, his brother Eanfrid, his mother, the widow of the savage Ethelfrid, and a large number of his relatives and supporters, had for many years been given shelter and protection in Ireland and Hibernicized Britain. Oswald was twelve years old at the period of his departure into exile in 617. He returned in 634 with his companions, all of them enriched by contact with a civilization till then wholly strange to them. It is easy to imagine the impression made on the minds of these simple barbarians by what they saw in Ireland where Greco-Roman culture blended with ancient Celtic wisdom and splendor mellowed the national life and enriched the channels through which it flowed. Oswald and his companions returned to England, not only Christianized but also completely Hibernicized, fluent speakers of the Irish tongue, and wholly devoted to Irish ideals. The returned wanderers were doubtless glad to find themselves once again amid the scenes of their youth, but it is little wonder that the call for help to Iona was speedy. The brutalities, the indecencies, the horror and the squalor of unchanging barbarism, o ce so natural to them,

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 206

could not henceforth be other than unendurable. To his Irish benefactors Oswald therefore sent hurried appeals, and these, recognizing under the savage manners and exterior of their proteges the elements of a common humanity and thinking the season opportune, decided to essay their regeneration.*

Bede picturesquely describes the manner in which the Irish missionaries were led into northern England. King Oswald as soon as he ascended the throne sent to the elders of the Irish among whom he and his followers, when in banishment, had received the sacrement of baptism, desiring they would send him a bishop, by whose instruction and ministry the English nation, which he governed, might be taught the advantages and receive the sacrament of the Christian Faith. They were not slow in granting his request and sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of singular meekness, piety and moderation, zealous in the cause of God. On his arrival the bishop fixed his episcopal see on the isle of Lindisfarne. Side by side Oswald and Aidan ruled and prepared for the spread of the Christian Faith and Irish learning.

The varied labors of the Irishmen are indicated by Bede: "From that time many of the Irish came daily into Britain and with great devotion preached the word to those provinces of the English over which King Oswald reigned, and those among them that had received priests' orders administered to them the grace of baptism. Churches were built in several places; the people joyfully flocked together to hear

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 207

the word; money and lands were given of the king's bounty to build monasteries; the English, great and small, were by their Irish masters instructed in the rules and observance of regular discipline; for most of them that came to preach were monks."*

Others were as Bede later tells us, laymen-physicians, scribes, lawyers, goldsmiths, and the like - though the monks were also working in most of the secular occupations. Bishop Aidan was himself a monk of Iona, which monastery was for a long time chief of all those of the northern Irish.

Aidan was not at all unlike his predecessors at Iona, Columcille, and Adamnan. Study, work, prayer, and fasting was the main occupation and happiness of his life. By unflagging work and planning in the course of sixteen years Aidan effected the regeneration of the English tribes. Christian civilization spread rapidly from Lindisfarne throughout the center and south of England.

It was of course chiefly in the north that Irish activity directed its first energies. But soon the Irish missionary, artist, and craftsman was exercizing his humanizing influence in every corner of the island. Fursa in East Anglia, Dicuil in Sussex, Finan in Essex, and Duina and his associates in Mercia were but representative of a great apostolate, embracing industry and art as well as religion and learning that elevated and organized the land. Wherever the Irishmen concentrated their energies the result was seen in a general

* Bede -- History of the Church of England III, III

speeding up of effort in every department of national or provincial life. Under their tutelage Northumbria became the first of the English states in influence and the first in the department of letters. Its kings were educated in Iona and Ireland, and there they learned to speak and write the Irish tongue and became acquainted with the graces of Irish literature, then already embodied in the literary shape in which its splendid fragments have come down to us.*

By the time of Bede and Alcuin, the north of England was covered with Irish schools. There were Irish monks and Irish trained monks at York, at Jarrow, at Monkmearmouth, at Melrose, at Hexham, at Whitby, and other foundations. The later English schools brief and fitful in their career, were often but the piecing together again of the older Irish foundations, broken up by the wars that accompanied the passing of one petty king or another

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain- Pages 269-270

through Anglo-Saxon history. The Irish scholars and craftsmen all over England put no curb on the liberality with which they dispensed their learning and skill. That the pupils should lag behind their masters is only in the nature of things. The slough of an age-long barbarism was not easily shed; but if a mere film of mediocrity and dulness in contrast to the depth of brutality and despair underneath is what is represented by progress in the Anglo-Saxon epoch, it is well to remember that on one or two directions and in one or two examples Anglo-Saxon skill rivaled its Irish achetype: The singularity of the Book of Lindisfarne as a work produced in England by the natives themselves, instructed by Irish artists, is manifest in the contrast between its finished beauty and the other memorials of its school. Its ascription to Eadfrid, a student in Ireland, may be correct. But, if genuinely Anglo-Saxon, it is no less manifestly a creation of Irish art, indistinguishable in its characteristics from other works of the period produced in Ireland. The strong tutelary Irish hand kept its grasp on England, guiding the hands and feet of the aborigines of the country, recording their first lispings of the syllables of civilization, nursing the promise of individuality in custom and speech, imposing the bridle of Christian principle on the gaping ferocities of the barbaric appetite and passion, and impressing everywhere the Irish form and imprint, so that the work of their hands was as the copy to the prototype, differing only as the voice of the neophyte reproduced in halting but faithful words the meaning of his instructor.*

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain.-Page 274

It would have been strange if, with Irish influence so powerful in Britain, there had been no reflex in the larger isle of that wonderful development reaching to the remote past out of which had come the old Irish laws. It has been the habit to ascribe the similarities between the brehon laws of Ireland and the old Saxon laws to their common origin in Aryan custom. But this is looking for recondite explanations where more natural and plausible explanations are ready at hand. It is like ignoring a man's parents and going back to more remote ancestors for family resemblances. Irish influence and example appear a much more reasonable answer to questions as to the origin of certain English laws than learned discussions on Aryan traditions or references to Welsh laws. The English rulers, who, as we know from the words of Bede, looked up to the Irishmen of their age as their great exemplars and could find nothing better than what was the custom among them, were not likely to borrow from almost every other department of Irish life and ignore the highly developed Irish laws. The coincidences that exist between early Irish laws and institutions and early English laws and institutions may well be taken as coincidences arising from simple borrowing, imitation, and transplantation.*

The fashions, the ideas, the methods, the points of view, the motive, spirit, law and rule that formed the current of Irish civilization found its way into channels of English life more numerous than it is possible to trace.

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain -Page 283

This Irish influence is clearly shown by the divergence that gradually manifested itself between the Irish monasteries and those of Continental foundation and influence. The Irish custom, rite, and rule was different and prevailed throughout England despite the sanction of Rome behind the Benedictine rule and the continental custom. Even after the Synod of Whitby the Celtic rule and ritual survived due to the powerful influence that Irishmen had exerted upon the English mind.

Anglo-Saxon civilization, such as it became, was thus in a large measure a transplanted Irish civilization, and it partook of the mediocrity in comparison with the original that is the fate of all reproductions. Its scholars were not numerous. Bede and Alcuin, the greatest of them, were collectors and distributers rather than thinkers and originators. No English school attained to the fame of even the lesser establishments in Ireland. No English scholar arose to challenge comparison in originality and strength of intellect with Erigena or Dungal or Sedulius Scotus. All this converges in the same direction. Civilization in England traces its genealogy to the work of Aidan and his countrymen.*

To transform a conglomeration of savage tribes into a civilized people was a herculean task and it is little wonder that the Irish missionaries should have won only partial success. The obstacles they encountered could not well have been greater. Not only were the Englishmen everlastingly fighting among themselves undoing the work of regeneration which Irish

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain - Page 285

missionaries with immense difficulty had set up among them, but the conquest of England was almost continuous from the time of Hengest and Horsa to the time of the Conqueror. The Anglo-Saxons slew the British, reducing some to slavery, fought the Irish colonies in the west and the Irish and Pict colonies in the north, massacred each other, and were then hewn down and cut to pieces by the Danes till the French conquerors arrived and laid both the Danes and English by their heels. In a hundred years, out of fourteen kings of Northumbria, seven were slain and six deposed. Within two hundred years thirty kings and queens cast away their crowns and took refuge in monasteries like Lindisfarne, where Irish missionaries had established oases of peace in the wilderness of disorder. Penda of Mercia killed five kings and at Bambarough heaped the ruins of all the surrounding villages into an enormous pile on which he projected the burning and extermination of all the English in Northumbria.*

It was amid conditions such as these that the Irish missionaries and schoolmen, many of them belonging to the bluest Milesian blood, impelled solely by supernatural motives, worked for the reclamation of the English. It is astonishing that most of them did not lose their lives surrounded as they were with the barbarian lust of murder. On the Continent, particularly in Germany, many of the Irish missionaries met violent death. In England no such fate awaited them. The sentiment of adoration which medieval Englishmen cherished for the authoritative Irishmen who walked among them

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain -Page 288

stayed their homicidal hands and quelled their savage yells even when thirsting for their kinsmen's blood. A rebuke from an Irish bishop was after potent enough to bring even the English kings prostrate at his feet. Such was the magic which the prestige of an immemorial civilization, typified in its nobler representatives, worked on a national mind slowly shedding the barbarism of ages. To this spell which the Irish will cast over a stolid, superstitious and undeveloped people, in whom a powerful war hysteria flowed as a perpetual undercurrent, are we to look for the root of the surprising results achieved by them, results which under like conditions could have been achieved by no other race under Heaven.*

*Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Making of Britain -Pages 293-294

IRELAND AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF EUROPE

The work of the Irish missionaries on the Continent parallelled their work In Scotland and Britain, the work of Culumcille was matched by that of Columbanus. In order to clearly understand and realize the Irish influence and work on the Continent and the part which they can truly claim towards the civilization of Germany and France we must dwell a little upon the condition of the West before this period.

In the middle of the second century Christianity already formed an element in Roman civilization and spread to the remotest provinces of the Empire, principally through their increased intercourse with each other, and especially by means of the campaigns of the Roman legions, even as far as the banks of the Rhine and into Britain, in spite of there being no special missionaries to those countries. In the course of the third century it spread still farther, and in the beginning of the fourth it was decidedly flourishing in Gaul and on the Rhine and Danube, as well as in Britain, bishoprics being founded at Cologne, Treves, and Mayence. In the second half of the fourth century Ausonius, the greatest Roman poet of the age, produced his enthusiastic description of the valley of the Moselle while Abrogast the Younger, who had command of the garrison at Treves during the incursions of various wandering tribes, was esteemed by Sidonius a model of the highest Roman culture in that region.

The German tribes from the Rhine and Danube were now being gradually brought under the sway of Greek and Roman culture through the medium of Christianity. But the internal dissolution of the Roman Empire and fresh incursions of savage tribes soon put a stop to all this. In the year 406, hordes of Vandals from the upper Rhine invaded Gaul, ancient Germany, and Burgundy, and settled on the left bank of the Rhine, while the Huns under Attila made inroads upon these, and the Franks from the Lower Rhine burst into Gaul, making an end of Roman rule in that country. The Angles and Saxons had taken possession of Britain before this, and what remained of Roman civilization in Upper Italy under the Heruli and Ostrogoths was destroyed by the Langobards and their allies. The German barbarians thus ruined and blotted out the work of several centuries. So vanished in the sixth century the last remains of Roman culture which had lingered on at various points, particularly in Southern Gaul.

In spite of what Christianity had done for the Merovingian kingdom, wretched indeed was its moral condition at the time of the death of its famous historian, Gregory of Tours, in 594. The disloyalty of the Franks had become proverbial. They had utterly repudiated Roman culture, appropriating only its accompanying vices. Gregory of Tours gives a true idea of the state of ignorance in the kingdom of the Franks, while he graphically sketches the depraved condition of the people and their ruler; he deplores the falling off of all striving after knowledge, and he himself, descended from a

Roman family, having bishops among his ancestors, has to confess that in writing in Latin, he confounds the genders of certain words, as well as the cases, and is embarrassed by numerous other grammatical difficulties. Merovingian records are written in such barbaric Latin that when we find one written in tolerably correct Latin, a suspicion of its genuiness is aroused as it may be a forgery of a later date.

In Northern and Central Italy the standard of civilization at that time was not much higher. Gregory the Great, one of the most celebrated of the Popes, who greatly strengthened the foundation of the Roman hierarchy, knew nothing of Greek - a most notable proof of the general low standard of civilization in the West. Even two hundred years later, the learned and gifted Spaniard, Claudius, Bishop of Turin, when expected to defend his views ~~respecting to defend his views~~ respecting worship of images, of which he disapproved, before the council of Italian bishops declared it to be a council of asses and the Irish monk, Dungal, was called upon to undertake the defence of image-worship. These two learned adversaries, Claudius, the Spaniard, and Dungal the Irishman, who met on the soil of Lombardy, are the representatives of these two countries, - the only ones which offered an asylum to Greco-Roman culture at the beginning of the seventh century, when it had declined in the West. Ireland was especially conspicuous in introducing it anew in the form of Christianity, principally into France, these efforts being made when civilization was at its lowest ebb, and the country in its most degraded condition.*

* Zimmer, Heinrich -The Irish Element in Medieval Culture - Pages 6-11

At the beginning of the sixth century Irish monks were seized with an unconquerable impulse to wander afar and preach Christianity to the heathen. In 563 Columcille with twelve confederates had left Ireland and founded Iona through the influence of which the Scots and Picts of Britain became converted to Christianity. In 590 at the time when Gregory of Tours, the historian of the Franks, brought out his denunciation of the corruption of his people, an Irishman, a native of Leinster bearing the ecclesiastical and Latin name of Columbanus, set forth with twelve companions from Bangor to preach the Gospel to the heathen. He landed in France and finding Christianity in a sinking condition, decided to settle in the Vosges mountains and establish a mission there. The number of converts increased so fast that he was soon obliged to found another upon the ruins of a forsaken Roman bath establishment at Luxeuil, which became in course of time a most fruitful centre of ecclesiastical and monastic life. Here he and his monks labored for ten years. But the intrepidity with which he approached and dealth with these Merovingeans drew upon him the hatred of the Queen Regent Brunhilde. Ecclesiastical differences arose with the Gallic clergy; he was driven with his companions from this field of their active labors and obliged to flee to Ireland. Contrary winds opposed their passage and interpreting this as a sign from on high, Columbanus returned to seek the patronage of the Langobard princess, Theudelinde, and founded Bobbio monastery at the

foot of the Apennines, between Genoa and Milan. One of his disciples at Luxeuil later founded St. Gall and these three remained throughout the middle ages the centers of a great string of monasteries which bore high reputations as centers of learning and culture.

The Irish movement of reconstructive activity in Europe began in earnest in the cultural apostolate of Columbanus and his coworkers in the sixth century. It ended in the less distinctive accomplishments of Marianus Scotus and his Irish contemporaries abroad in the eleventh century. There were distinguished representatives of Irish culture in France and Italy before Columbanus; and there were schoolmen of the Gael winning laurels in the European amphitheater after Marianus and his company. But they were praecurrentes and sequelae. They did not belong to the main movement and decisive campaign. The Irish apostolate was a full-bodied and rounded thing, integral and extended, a living organized functioning flux and impulse, embraced in fine medieval centuries. It was strong and vehement and luminous in the beginning. It reached perhaps the plenitude of its destined force and illumination in the ninth century. It was strenuous and multifarious in the eleventh century, also.*

Luxeuil proved to be the greatest and most influential of the monasteries and schools established by Columbanus. It became the recognized spiritual head of all the countries under Frankish government, a nursery of statesmen and pontiffs, of monastic founders and missionaries, of culture

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe - Page 20

and to this foundation of the great Gael of Bangor is largely credited the renewal of the Burgundian kingdom. Early in its career it attained the climax of its greatness. No monastery in the West outside of the Gaedhaltacht attracted so many disciples. Under Eustatius, whom Columbanus had placed at the head of its schools, Luxeuil became the model abbey of all the Frankish lands, so that other foundations, into which laxness had found its way, renewed themselves by its example. In the seventh century Luxeuil was the most famous school in Christendom outside of Ireland. Young monks and clerks and scions of the ruling Frank and Burgundian families crowded to it. Lyons, Autun, Langres, and Strasbourg, the most famous cities in Gaul, sent their youth to it. The discipline that molded them under Irish rule became the most powerful single influence in the surrounding kingdom. Like a great tree the abbey thrust out umbrageous branches in all directions. From Italy to the lower Rhine almost every year that followed saw the rise of some monastery founded and peopled by the sons of Luxeuil.*

From among the immediate companions of Columbanus, who appear to have left Ireland with him, there were several who like himself became the founders not merely of monasteries and schools but of cities and towns. Among these was Ceallach or Gall who founded St. Gall in Switzerland which is to-day pointed out as one of the most complete and highly developed of all the monasteries of the middle ages. At one time there were 3000 students at St. Gall.

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe - Pages 68-69

It is estimated that 104 monasteries and seats of learning, some of them rivaling the mother establishment in influence, were founded by Columbanus and his associates and disciples in France and on its borders. They made their beginning, most of them, as Luxeuil began, on the Irish model. In the Merovingian age the pristine Irish missionary spirit endowed them with the energy of great missionary centers, accomplishing a work so potent that at least sixty three of their sons have been apotheosized as the apostles of the lands and nations to whom they bore the Christian evangel and the rudiments of civilization.*

The work of Irish missionaries in Italy is seen at its best in the monastery of Bobbio founded by Columbanus. This monastery had one of the finest libraries and collections of MSS to be found anywhere in the Middle Ages. Not only in number but in quality as well, Bobbio surpassed all the monasteries of Italy. This foundation long remained one of the most highly reputed of all the European seats of learning and culture.

The Romans had preceded the Irish missionaries in Gaul. They had likewise preceded them in England though their efforts there were practically confined to the region about the mouth of the Thames. No apostle or missionary preceded the Irish apostles in Germany. Single-handed they made accessible Germany Christian, so that it is not certain that the missionaries of a later age, such as Boniface and his contemporaries, even preached to the heathen. There were Irish missionaries

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe - Pages 72-73

in Germany before there were Irish missionaries in England, so that the Germans were Christian before the countrymen of Boniface, and before Boniface was ever born.

More than 1000 years ago (c860) one of the first Germans able to write, Ermenrich of Ellwagen, in correspondence with Grimoald, abbot of St. Gall gave expression to his sense of gratitude for the Irish work among his people of which he himself was one of the first fruits. "How could we forget Ireland," he wrote,"the isle whence the brilliant rays of so great a light and the sun of faith shone for us? Bestowing philosophy on the great and small, she fills the Church with her science and teaching."

Mabillon enumerates four benefits which the Irish conferred on the German people: - 1) the faith; 2) the erection of bishoprics; 3) the introduction of arts and letters; 4) the knowledge of agriculture.*

The Irish in Germany as in France taught agriculture less by speech than by example. It has often been observed that there are no places in Ireland where the grass is so green and the soil so luxurious as in the vicinity of the old monasteries. This is because of the labor of the monks who there made their home. They labored in Germany and elsewhere as they did in Ireland. They reared live-stock as well as crops. It was the custom among the Germans, before the Irish masters appeared among them, to raise scanty crops, after the manner of primitive peoples, from one patch of ground until it was exhausted and then abandon it for another

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe - Pages 80-81

Medieval Irishmen in Germany changed all this. They taught the Germans how to raise crops from the same area for an indefinite period and they taught them best by doing it themselves. They retrieved the land about their foundations and made it an abode of beauty. Within the foundations and without they dispensed the arts. In the basilica they taught music and religion. In the scriptorium they taught illumination, miniature painting, the Irish script, the preparation of vellum and the ink, and the general work involved in the production of manuscripts. The Irish foundations in Germany became in time the chief book-producing centres, outside of Ireland, in Europe. Had these medieval Irishmen merely lived in the country and built their foundations for themselves alone they would have conferred an inestimable benefit on Germany. But their ambition was not for their own comfort but for the salvation of the German peoples. Far in advance of anything at that time known, they built hostels for travellers, hospitals for the sick, asylums and shelters for the poor. Later on when these Irish retreats were permitted to fall into decay, having been seized by the hands of others, it was recognized in both France and Germany, that no people could see to their operation with the efficiency of their Irish founders, and decrees were passed ordering their restoration to their rightful owners.*

The missionaries and schoolmen of the Gael succeeded each other in German lands during all the centuries of transition from the era of Columbanus until the opening of the great period of scholastic speculation. In that twilight period their light shone with a brilliance which the later age

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe - Pages 81-82

of intellectual splendor was to dim by comparison. But the tradition of their greatness endured, and the impress made on an age when they were almost the sole personages of light and leading was still borne by the ages that followed. As their fame endured biographies and popular adoration canonized them as apostles of its lands and cities. It is significant that every province in Germany proclaims this Irish race as its benefactor. Austria celebrates St. Colman, St. Vergiliun, St. Modestus, and others. Burgundy Alsace Helvetia Suevia with one voice proclaim the glory of Columbanus, Gallus, Florentius and Trudpert who first preached the true religion among them. Who were the founders of the monasteries of St. Thomas of Strasbourg and of St. Nicholas at Memmingen but these same Irishmen? Franconia and the Buchonian forest honor as their apostles St. Kilian and St. Firmin. And the Irish monasteries of St. Aegidius and St. James which in olden times flourished at Nuremberg and Würzburg, to whom are they to be ascribed but to the holy monks of ancient Ireland? The land between the Rhine and the Moselle rejoiced in the labors of Wendelin and Dysibod. The old and famous monastery of St. James of Mainz was founded, according to the best authorities, by these same Irish. The Saxons and the tribes of Northern Germany are indebted to them to an extent which may be judged from the fact that the first ten bishops who occupied the see of Verden belonged to that race.*

In the age of Charlemagne all of Europe's out-

* Fitzpatrick, B. -Ireland and the Foundations of Europe- Page 94

standing scholars were Irishmen. In the ninth century Eriugena had no equal in Europe. During the scholastic era there were not in the background. It is not for their originality that Europe thanks them it is for their earnestness to convert Europe from the quagmires of barbarism to the Christian civilization and culture that had been developed in Ireland. In the words of Zimmer they were not originators with the single exception of Johannes Scotus Eriugena, yet they were instructors in every known branch of science and learning of the time, possessors and bearers of a higher culture than was at that period to be found anywhere on the Continent and can surely claim to have been the pioneers - to have laid the corner-stone of Western culture on the the Continent, the rich results of which Germany shares and enjoys to-day, in common with all other civilized nations.*

* Zimmer, Heinrich - The Irish Element in Medieval Culture - Pages 130-131

SUMMARY

We have seen that long before the Christian era the ancient Irish had a very definite social and political organization. That they have a code of laws that was well suited to the state of society that then existed. That native learning was actively cultivated under the direction of two learned classics called Druids and Bards who were priests, poets, historians, and judges as well as teachers. That the pagan Irish had a knowledge of letters. That they had developed many useful arts and were skilled and artistic craftsmen both in metal work and stone-carving. That they excelled in the art and science of music.

Christianity having been embraced as the official religion of the Roman state began to spread from Rome. Positive attempts at conversion of the barbarians were made by the Popes at Rome and Patrick finally prevailed upon Pope Celestine to send him as an organizer of the church in Ireland when Palladius, the first envoy of Rome had failed. Patrick accomplished three things which make him an eminently significant man in history. He organized the Christianity which already existed; he converted kingdoms which were still pagan; and he brought Ireland into connection with the church of the Empire and made it formally part of universal Christendom. While there had been Christians and evidences of a high type of civilization in Ireland before St. Patrick, it was he who in the course of a single generation made the whole island Christian

and initiated that chapter of history which made Ireland the "island of saints and scholars." Almost at once a devouring hunger for learning and a burning thirst for the spread of Christianity came over the people. In a period of general and cataclysmic decadence throughout Europe the Irish were the veritable saviors of civilization.

The Irish built up a great educational system in their Monastic schools. The course of studies was the most complete in all Europe. It included:

1) Vernacular Studies: The Irish language, its grammar, metrics, literature both secular and religious, prose and poetry, history, antiquities, etc.

2) Christian Studies: Theology, especially the study of the Scriptures with the commentaries of the Fathers thereon, and in the ninth century at least the study of Dialectics and Philosophy was pursued with success.

3) Classical Studies: Acquaintance with several Latin and Greek authors of the classical period. Superior knowledge of Latin and a good working knowledge of Greek.

4) Aesthetic Studies: Cultivation of Art and Music. This includes illumination, metal work and stone carving.

5) Scientific Studies: All the scientific knowledge of the time in Western Europe, special emphasis on Astronomy.

Thus we see that the course of studies of the early Irish monastic school was much more varied in scope and fuller in content than the Trivium and Quadrivium as taught in contemporary Europe.

In the early centuries of the dark ages, Ireland was famed far and wide as the retreat and nursery of learning and the center of intellectual activity while the rest of Europe was the prey of barbarism. This would appear to have been distinction enough. Little reproach could have been cast upon her had she been content to enjoy the fruits of her own civilization, sharing those fruits with such foreign visitors as sought them on Irish soil. But the fact appears that she was not content.

At an early period Irish sanctity and culture became animated by an ardent spirit of proselytism and missionary zeal. The converts of one generation became the apostle of another. Columcille carried Christianity and culture to Scotland while other Irish saints carried it to Wales and Britain. Columbanus and his followers performed the same great work in Europe. It is for this work that the world owes a debt to the Irish. The value of their labors has been recognized especially in recent years by all those who have come to know them. It has been appreciated very thoroughly that without such unselfish devotion to the cause as the Irish gave, civilization on the continent would have sunk ever so much lower than it actually did.and the return of it would have been delayed for centuries beyond what it actually was. The Irish were the saviors of civilization.

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